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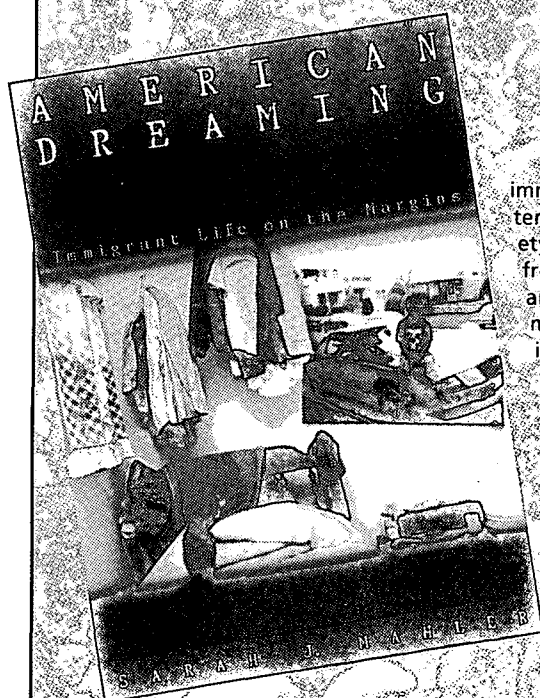
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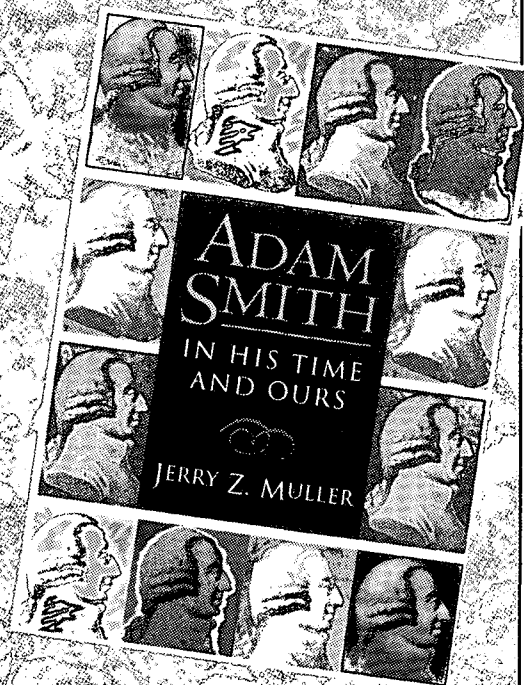
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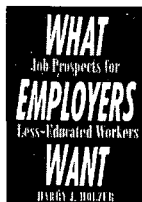
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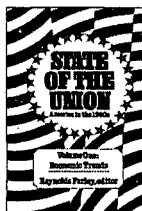
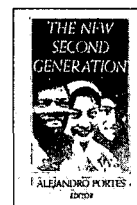
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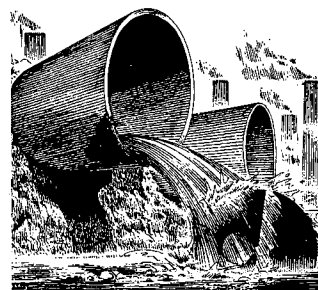
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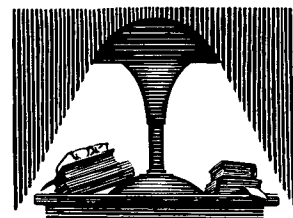
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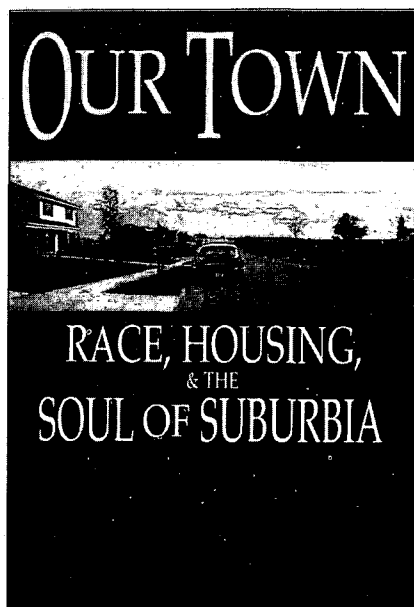
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On the surface, Robert Putnam's "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America" (page 34) offers an explanation for a puzzling trend: Why are Americans less engaged in civic life and more distrustful of each other than we were a quarter century ago? But, rather unexpectedly, Putnam proposes what amounts to a new interpretation of contemporary history, based on the different experiences of generations and particularly the influence of the "long civic generation" that came of age during the 1930s and 40s and is now passing from the scene. This article is one of the most important that we have published.

Two other pieces in this issue give a troubling picture of our civic culture. In "The Populist Road to Hell" (page 24), Peter Schrag tells the story of California's experiment with term limits, the latest episode in what he describes as the state's "plebiscitary rampage." Since Proposition 13 passed in 1978, California has seen a continuing cycle of "reform and political frustration." Populist desperation may be the flip side of civic disengagement.

And in "Virtuality and Its Discontents" (page 50), Sherry Turkle casts a skeptical, anthropological eye on the emergence of civil society in deep cyberspace. Virtual communities, alas, do not seem likely to make up for the failings of the real ones we live in.

PAUL STARR

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Cover: Bob Dahm

Illustrations: William Bramhall (25), **Bob Dahm** (39, 51), **Christopher Bing** (59).

ROBERT KUTTNER

Fearful Symmetry

The 1994 election, more than any in recent memory, "nationalized" politics. That is, the Republicans ran on a coherent ideology and program; Newt Gingrich's Contract with America became the manifesto. Even though the actual swing in the popular vote was small, it was consistent across the country—enough to give Republicans control of both houses of Congress and most statehouses. Given the drama of the Democrats losing the U.S. House for the first time in 40 years, the Republican ferocity, and rare party unity under Gingrich, the result was almost parliamentary. The Republicans, despite slender numerical margins in the House and Senate, took their victory as a mandate for radical change.

However, ours is not a parliamentary system. And the president happens to be of the opposite party. In claiming a mandate, the Republicans have made much of the fact that Clinton was elected 36 months ago, while they were elected 12 months ago. But the fact remains that he is president—in a system with very careful checks and balances, designed specifically to cool the passions of temporary majorities. And lately, he has been acting like one.

For most of 1995, Clinton attempted to accommodate himself to the Republicans' congressional majority and presumed mandate by meeting them more than halfway—embracing budget balance, major program cuts, more delegation to the states, and a partial regulatory relief. He even supported a welfare reform plan only slightly less harsh than the Republicans'.

Beyond this programmatic accommodation was a tactical theory, one put forth by Clinton's latest strategist, the sometime Republican Dick Morris. The idea was to position the president above the squabbling two parties, to differentiate him both from old Democrats too wedded to government and new Republicans who would cut too deeply. But with the Republican refusal to meet Clinton halfway, and the polls showing that Republicans

mistakenly located themselves far to the right of most voters, triangulation collapsed. Clinton suddenly found himself a tough partisan Democrat again, almost in spite of himself, drawing bright lines in the sand.

My last piece for *The American Prospect*, in our Summer 1995 issue, was titled "A Pile of Vetoes." The reference was to Clinton's repeated declaration, back in his conciliatory phase, that he wasn't elected to deliver a pile of vetoes. But given the plain radicalism of the Republican program, a pile of vetoes was precisely indicated. Lo, by November, Clinton found himself piling up the vetoes, cheered on by leading editorialists and public opinion. Dick Morris should join David Gergen in the graveyard of Republican Clinton advisers who had counselled extra-partisanship and appeasement.

Despite their zeal, it is evident that the Republicans will fall short of enacting their entire Contract this legislative session, though depending on Clinton's resolve, they will give voters a big taste of it. And that sets in motion the 1996 election as a kind of grand plebiscite on the direction of the country. Now that Clinton is once again behaving like a partisan Democrat, the voters will have a full year to consider the contending philosophies. Do they really want Gingrich's Contract, with its massive cuts in Medicare; its form of "devolution" that mainly sticks states with the liability for social ills (see Lenny Goldberg, "Come the Devolution," page 66); its rollback of consumer and environmental regulation (see Robert Dreyfuss, "Toxic Cash," page 59); and its shifting of the tax burden onto working families? The polls indicate not. It may well be that the Republicans have overreached, and that in a fair fight the pendulum will swing back to the Democrats. Either way, it would be better to elect a president and a Congress of the same party, and then to hold that party accountable for the results, rather than having four more years of divided government and public sourness.

The problem, however, is that 1996 may not be a fair fight. Electoral politics in this era has been nationalized—but not symmetrically. The first asymmetry is money. Democrats, for the past several decades, used the power of congressional incumbency to raise money from business interest groups who didn't share the Democratic philosophy but needed to buy

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"access." The process was corrupting, even if the money didn't take the form of literal bribes. It caused Democrats to spend inordinate time raising money from people with little in common with the Democratic base and to ignore the less remunerative (and more crucial) task of rebuilding the party's grass roots. Even worse, it created a kind of affinity between many Democrats and the well-heeled financiers they cultivated.

Pro-business center-right Democrats seemed modern and sensible; their maturity was validated and rewarded by generous checks. Liberals, by contrast, seemed archaic and conflictual. Their "class warfare" was punished, both editorially and in their inability to raise funds. Indeed, while the Democratic Leadership Council was partly a principled and strategic search for a new center, it was also a plain move to where the money was. While more liberal groups scrambled for money, the DLC with its antiliberal message found it had no trouble selling out thousand-dollar-a-plate fundraisers to Washington business lobbyists.

The Clinton administration had a rare shot at serious campaign finance reform, limiting PAC money and replacing it with substantial public funding. It is tempting to say, charitably, that the bill went down in the end-of-session confusion and the Republican tactical shift to just-say-no hardball. In ugly reality, the bill kept getting delayed both because the White House never made it a top priority and because too many congressional Democrats were not sure they really wanted to give up their privileged access to special interest money.

Now, however, the Democrats have the worst of both worlds. With the Republican takeover of Congress, the Democrats no longer have incumbency to sell. Gingrich, as tactically ruthless here as elsewhere, has proven the master of the shakedown. Business PAC money that used to go to Democratic Committee chairmen and their allies now goes disproportionately to Republicans. While Clinton has used his own incumbency to raise a pile of "soft" (unregulated) money for his re-election campaign, Democratic Senate and House candidates will be strapped. A few incumbents such as John Kerry, recently remarried to the widow Heinz, will be able to draw on substantial private fortunes. But in the typical contested race, the Republican will outspend the Democrat by three or four to one.

Money isn't everything in politics, of course,

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but it is a lot. A good example is Representative Enid Waldholtz, freshman of Utah, lately in the papers because of her sometime-fugitive husband, Joe. To beat the popular incumbent, Karen Shepherd, Waldholtz, with a lot of dubious financial razzle-dazzle, pumped more than a million dollars into TV spots in the campaign's final days, narrowly ousting Shepherd in a three-way race. Waldholtz's spending was very likely illegal. But given the kind of money the Republicans can raise legally, a great many Republican freshman in marginal seats may literally buy their re-elections. So, while there is a nominal symmetry in the newly nationalized political arena, and while polls show Republicans on the losing side of many of their own chosen issues, money may prevent 1996 from being a fair rematch.

The antidote to money, surely, is people. In comforting mythology, the GOP is the party of money and the Democrats the party of the people. But in today's overheated political climate, a great many Democrats are in hock to big money and a lot of the passion and popular activism is on the conservative side. In the 1990s, who can boast of genuine grassroots activity, rather than letterhead organizations and Potemkin villages? There's the Christian right, the legions of Limbaugh ditto-heads, the right-to-lifers, home-schoolers, gun-nuts, and a lot of yeasty local Republican parties.

To be sure, there is a lot of sham populism on the right, too. The New Women's Forum, for example, is mainly a handful of intellectual antifeminists with op-ed skills and a lot of conservative foundation money. The National Organization for Women, by contrast, actually has 250,000 dues-paying members. As Jonathan Cohn deliciously reveals in "Children's Crusade" (page 31), much of the youth campaign for budget balance is sheer public relations. Still, the right has enviable grass roots, many of them authentic and thriving.

What about the liberal side? Environmentalists, as Robert Dreyfuss demonstrates, are a genuine mass movement—real enough to block the Republican stampede to dismantle a quarter century of green regulation. The election of true activists to the top offices of the AFL-CIO is likewise one of the most hopeful events in this political era. (See Thomas Geoghegan, "Dear Brother Sweeney," page

72.) Labor is still the backbone of much local Democratic Party organizing, and if labor cannot revive from the base, it is hard to imagine a revival of progressive politics. To read Robert Putnam's "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America" (page 34) is to grasp that the decay of grassroots life is ubiquitous. Yet to offset what Charles E. Lindblom called the "privileged position of business" in a capitalist democracy, liberals necessarily rely on grassroots activism more than conservatives.

There are, of course, the other usual suspects of the New Deal-Great Society coalition—civil rights activists, civil libertarians, beneficiaries of welfare-state spending, and dozens of single-interest constituency groups. But this is often more the problem than the solution. Though these groups depend on activist government for supportive fiscal and regulatory policies, they don't exactly constitute a Democratic Party base—and often can be found squabbling with each other and cursing out the faithless liberals in Congress for failing to deliver enough. A recent newspaper account of public cynicism quoted a black nonvoter in an urban slum: Why should I vote for these people, he asked, what have they done for me lately? Tellingly, the Million Man March was an extra-politics event, led by an antisystem figure, Louis Farrakhan. It is hard to imagine a black elected official bringing together such an event. Even Jesse Jackson, a semi-establishment leader, could not have done it.

So the Democratic base is a mess. Indeed, the closer you look, the thinner it is. And this does secondary damage. Not only does it mean there are fewer liberal activists to offset conservative grassroots strength and money. It also dries up the natural pools of candidate recruitment. To win back Congress and statehouses, Democrats need not only volunteers and money, they need attractive candidates. This year, they are having a hard time recruiting them. Worse, there are a disproportionate number of retirements—not surprisingly. It's not much fun to be a Democratic incumbent right now. And there are too few convincing contenders to replace them.

Looking around at state legislators to move up to congressman, and congressmen to move up to governor or senator, the Democratic farm clubs are pretty thin. A few .290 hitters here and there, but not much bench strength. The whole problem, of course, is interlinked—as is the solution. A more stirring message and more presidential leadership

would excite more grassroots activity; more grass roots would provide a habitat for better candidates. More activism would at least partly offset conservative big money. And taking back Congress would provide another shot at meaningful campaign finance reform, to keep money in its place once and for all.

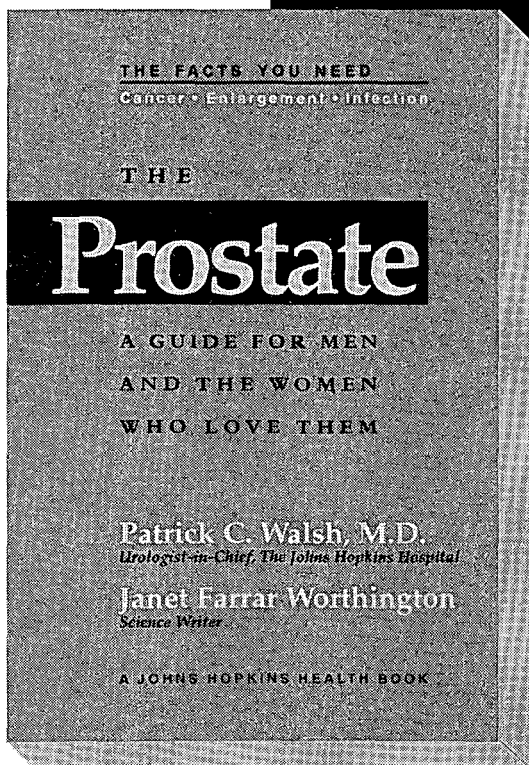
There is the further risk of asymmetric campaign finance reform. Watch out this spring for a nominally bipartisan "reform" package, supported by the usual good-government naifs, that limits PAC spending but leaves lots of loopholes for injecting personal wealth into electoral politics. By coincidence, the one source of funding that this brand of reform would reliably squelch would be labor PACs—the sole substantial organized counterweight to business political finance.

Given all of the above, it will take a lot for the 1996 election to be a truly symmetrical plebiscite—a fair rematch. Of course, one should never underestimate the capacity of Newt Gingrich to overreach, the propensity of

Bob Dole to turn nasty, and the potentially fratricidal schisms in all that right-wing grassroots activism. Nor should one underestimate Bill Clinton, who evidently has more political lives than a cat.

Our friend E.J. Dionne, in a flawlessly timed book to be published in February, titled *They Only Look Dead*, argues that the pendulum is primed to swing back to the Democrats. Dionne's text, which generously credits several articles from this journal, argues that the voters really don't want the Gingrich brand of laissez-faire. They recognize the need for a mixed economy and a competent government. They voted for Republicans in 1994, Dionne argues, because the Democrats didn't deliver it.

But, says Dionne, the laissez-faire solution has been rejected in American history every time voters got a taste of it, because it doesn't work. This could portend a swing back to the Democrats, but if government is still found wanting it could also fuel more of an antisystem vote—to Ross Perot or worse. The fact remains that to achieve progressive politics, there is no substitute for two necessary complements: popular activism and competent governance. □



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TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Republicans want to make sure voters have a proper appreciation of their efforts in time for the 1996 elections. Under the budget plan they approved this past November, tax cuts would apply partially to 1995 and checks for special refunds on 1995 taxes would be mailed out in—guess when—October 1996.

On the other hand, the elderly would not see higher Medicare premiums reflected in their Social Security checks until January 1997.

Under the pending telecommunications legislation, cable television rates would be deregulated, but a little-noticed provision delays any rate increases until just after November 1996.

Now you've noticed.

WELFARE FOR BANKS, ONE MORE TIME

Readers of this column may recall the Republicans' disdain for direct lending, a popular Clinton administration reform of the student loan program. [See Devil in the Details, "Welfare for Banks, Again," *TAP*, Spring 1995.] Under direct lending, the government lends tuition money directly to students rather than simply guaranteeing loans made by banks or private lenders. The appeal for students is two-fold: It makes the loan application process far simpler, and it allows them the option of paying back their loans as a percentage of their income. No less important, the program saves the government money, by cutting down on opportunities for waste and eliminating millions in bank subsi-

dies. (Banks demand the subsidies as a price for making loans in the first place, even though only credit cards and industrial loans are more profitable than the student business.) In the final compromise hammered out in 1993, Clinton agreed to phase in direct lending gradually and have it compete with the private lenders for much of the business.

Almost immediately, direct lending was a hit with students, so much so that the government also offered to consolidate old loans. In other words, the government offered to pay off a student's existing private debts and issue in its place one new loan under direct lending. This was a real boon to students, many of whom carried three or four different loans, each held by a different lender. (Student loans are often bought and sold in secondary markets, so that a student might pay one bank one month, and a different bank the next, for each separate loan.) In the first year the Department of Education made the offer, it consolidated more than 25,000 loans.

But this success came at a price. Private lenders fought hard to reign in the initiative and hold on to their business. The Republicans obliged. Congressman Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania and Senator Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas pushed through bills severely limiting involvement in direct lending, es-

entially guaranteeing the banks the rest of the business by law.

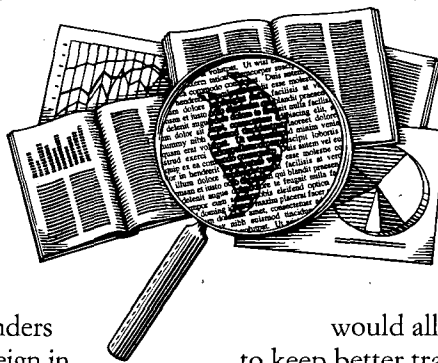
Even that quota, though, wasn't enough for the private lenders, who remained angry that the government might steal away existing loans through consolidation. Once again, they leaned on their Republican friends, who in turn leaned on the Education Department. According to a high-ranking official at the department, several Republican staffers called the administrators in charge of direct lending and warned them either to cease advertising the program to students or incur even deeper cuts. Later, Goodling included a provision in his bill restricting the department's advertising.

Goodling and his pals weren't finished yet. The one rap on direct lending is that it puts a lot of administrative responsibility in the hands of the Department of Education, a federal agency known for management prob-

lems. To its credit, the department under Secretary Richard Riley has begun constructing a national student loan data-

base, which

would allow it not only to keep better track of loans but also to police independent contractors involved in the program. Did Gingrich's Congress, so enthralled with technology and so concerned about government inefficiency, applaud this innovation? Nope. They proposed to zero out its funding instead, as



part of an 80 percent cut in administrative funding for all student loan programs.

Markets work great when competition exists, and it's fine—even ideal—to have government compete with private lenders for student loan business. But if the Republicans don't allow government to advertise its program or run it efficiently, there's no way the government can keep up.

Of course, maybe that's the whole idea.

PEASANTS, UNITE

In the lead article in the summer issue of the Democratic Leadership Council's *The New Democrat*, Michael Rothschild offers the following:

The End of Scarcity and the Politics of Plenty

"Thanks to the near-miraculous capabilities of microelectronics, we are vanquishing scarcity. . . . Consequently, the venerable politics of class warfare, which results from an economic reality in which a fixed amount of goodies must be divvied up among too many grasping hands, is dying, along with conventional economic thinking. Stunning technological advances are shoving aside the gloomy politics of 'limits to growth' and replacing them with the politics of plenty. . . .

"For many decades, the 'economic pie' will grow faster than the population, and the widespread rise in living standards will make appeals to class warfare sound increasingly absurd. Economic growth of such magnitude is beyond historical experience and hard to imagine. . . .

"The losers this time are those who cannot or will not participate in the Knowledge Age economy. . . . Never before has the income gap between educated and uneducated Americans been as wide or fast-growing. Like illiterate peasants in the Age of Steam, today's unskilled are being left behind by the new economy. . . .

"Other than the poorest 20 percent of Americans whose illiteracy prevents their participation in the Knowledge Age, everyone senses the promise of the new economy."

Is any of this true?

The Census Bureau reports that in 1993 (the latest year available) the incomes of the bottom 95 percent of families were worse off than in 1989, with the middle 20 percent having suffered a 6.7 percent (or \$2,648) income loss. Between 1989 and 1994 real wages have declined for the bottom 80 percent of men and the bottom 60 percent of women.

Are these losers "uneducated" and "illiterate," a group on par with nineteenth-century "peasants" who "cannot or will not participate in the Knowledge Age economy"? Are they "unskilled"? The group whose wages have continuously fallen since 1979 actually consists of the three-fourths of the workforce that does not have a four-year college degree: those who have not completed high school (about 13.7 percent), those with just a high school degree (40.5 percent), and those with some college or an associate college degree (22.3 percent). By

Rothschild's logic, today's peasantry apparently includes men with from one to three years of college, a group whose wages fell 11 percent from 1979 to 1993. In fact, his peasantry even includes male college graduates, a group whose wages have fallen continuously since 1987.

Rothschild is only making explicit what has been implicit in New Democrat policies and politics: The Democrats should appeal to the "forgotten middle class" solely on issues related to values. Above all, Democrats should not present an economic populist platform lest they fall into the trap of practicing the politics of class warfare. But this would indeed be a curious moment for Democrats to eschew class politics since the Republicans are charging ahead full-throttle with a program designed to massively shift power and wealth from the many to the few.

Elsewhere in the article, Rothschild contends that it's the winners in the economy who are abandoning the Democrats. In fact, it was the economic losers among both men and women who abandoned the Democrats in 1994. The only net swing to Democrats was among college graduates. Census data indicate that 73 percent and 69 percent, respectively, of the 1992 and 1994 electorate were "losers" (noncollege-educated).

Rothschild may be literate, but he is apparently innumerate when it comes to political and economic arithmetic.

[*"Peasants, Unite"* by Lawrence Misbel.]

ROBYN GEAREY

Cosmopolitics

George Washington famously disdained faction. In his farewell address, he warned the nation against the "baneful effects of the spirit of party." This dislike for partisanship may be the only connection between Washington and his namesake, the magazine *George*. Editor John F. Kennedy, Jr. describes *George* as post-partisan, an effort to engage more people in civic life by making politics more fun.

George, of course, has been widely ridiculed by its media peers, as "Cosmo without the intellectual content." *Boston Globe* media critic Mark Jurkowitz dubbed it "a political fanzine . . . clearly mired in an adolescent worship of glitz and glamour." *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham referred to



George as "the political magazine from which the politics had been tactfully removed." The *New Republic* accused young Kennedy of "squander[ing] the most valuable remainder of his father's legacy," namely the elder Kennedy's belief that public figures should display dignity, at least in public.

But the media protests too much. JFK, Jr. is hardly to blame for the lack of dignity characteristic of today's politics. Nor is his magazine the first to conceive of politics as

gossip and entertainment. *George* is just the first to explicitly embrace fun as a political creed. The slide of politics into entertainment is nothing new, and lost in the highbrow critiques is the fact that many of the very magazines that have attacked *George* are among the prime offenders. The benchmarks of this trend include the birth of *People* magazine, a print organ plainly influenced by the short attention span of television; the finding by *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times Magazine*, among others, that public issues are boring while articles about people sell; and the embrace of glitz even by quality magazines such as the *New Yorker*.

To pick just one example, the topic of a recent *Newsweek* cover was "The Overclass." The cover blurb asked: "Is a new elite of highly paid, high-tech strivers pulling away from the rest of America?" Good question. But the reader seeking a discussion of the causes and consequences of our two-class society looked in vain. Most of the feature was devoted to the "Overclass 100"—an all-too-predictable cameo snapshot of 100 notables. These included Al Gore, George Stephanopoulos, Paul Krugman, Katie Couric, Chris Whittle, and Robert S. McNamara. Opinion leaders, perhaps, but an Overclass?

Where could this trend possibly have begun? The trail leads back to none other than John F. Kennedy, Sr. The emergence of television, combined with the glamorous good looks of the youthful Kennedys, made JFK the first celebrity-president. Jacqueline Kennedy, coming after the frumpy Mamie Eisenhower, the homey Bess Truman, and the fiercely unfashionable Eleanor Roosevelt, was the only glamorous first lady in living memory. The three years of Kennedy's presidency began as the New Frontier, but are best

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remembered as Camelot, a fantasy itself inspired by Hollywood.

The nation's fascination with the Kennedys was propelled by the media's realization that Jackie Kennedy's pillbox hats made better copy than her husband's politics. Both President Kennedy and his first lady had serious, purposive sides to their personalities. But it is as if young John Kennedy (as well as the press) took from each parent the glamour without the substance. Given this legacy and his childhood in the public eye, it is not surprising that JFK, Jr.'s impression of political life has been distorted by spotlights and cameras. Celebrity is surely an aspect of politics; Kennedy thinks it is the essence.

This is undoubtedly the principle on which Kennedy based his decision to create a "lifestyle" magazine for the political world. Make politics fun and it will "reinvigorate" the public's interest, says Kennedy in the inaugural issue of *George*. But Kennedy's error is to equate political fun with passive entertainment. The type of passive entertainment that *George* provides is similar to, well, television. We are amused and entertained, but not inspired to do much more than sit there.

Michael Schudson's article "Voting Rites" (TAP, Fall 1994) reminds us that politics was once both fun and an engaging civic enterprise. He argues that we need to recapture some sense of excitement and engagement in political activity. The social critic Neil Postman recalls political debates in the time of Lincoln: all-day affairs where the only "entertainment" was the intense discussion of political issues taking place on stage. Of course, a great deal of nineteenth-century politicking entailed banal sloganeering, corrupt vote buying, and character assassination. But at its best it included serious oratory and substantial civic participation, and a candidate had to have something substantive to say if he was to hold an audience's attention for several hours.

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman further argues that the visual nature of television lends itself to style over substance, especially in the political arena. Politics could not escape the influence of

television and has been transformed by it. In the age of sound bites and image consultants, a seven-hour political debate would now seem interminably dull. Of course, television has served to make politics more accessible, allowing millions of people the opportunity to see debates and elections, but this accessibility has come at the price of substance. "The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter," writes Postman, "but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining." This is precisely the problem with *George*.

Today, problems that concern most citizens—living standards, crime, health care—seem impervious to political remedy. It is easy to see why voting, let alone

active participation in politics, appears pointless. Politics as celebrity offers escapism rather than participation or solution. Despite its ambitious slogan "Not just politics as usual," *George* is just that—an

The high-brow critiques miss the point: the very magazines attacking *George* are part of the problem.

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intensification of the status quo.

In *George's* treatment of presidential candidates, we learn that Lamar Alexander prefers Oprah to Uma, Letterman to Leno, and aisle to window, but nothing about his social policy views. *George* informs us that both Bob Dole and Phil Gramm are Cancers and that President Clinton, a Leo, was apparently a Siberian fur trader in a past life. We aren't instructed in Newt Gingrich's astrological background, but the Q and A with the speaker includes this softball from interviewer John Perry Barlow: "You seem like an extremely compassionate guy. How do you deal with the fact that you are widely regarded not to be?" Gingrich's equally provocative response? "I don't think I do."

Barlow's kid-glove handling of Gingrich is typical of *George's* attitude toward political figures. John Kennedy's encounter with George Wallace had the potential to be explosive, but Kennedy keeps it light: "What TV shows do you watch?" he asks, followed by questions about Wallace's favorite books and movies. The interview is accompanied by sidebar recollections of Wallace by prominent public figures like Jesse Jackson and Bill Clinton. Such is Kennedy's commitment to "post-partisanship." One can imagine how he might have interviewed Churchill or Hitler.

There is, of course, no such thing as post-partisan politics. In its essence, politics is a battle of contending visions, a struggle for power, and hence, inescapably partisan. *George*, and the whole trend of celebrity politics, implies that politicians, like movie stars, exist to entertain. John Kennedy, Sr. managed to project star quality, but still subordinate his celebrity to public purposes. Richard Reeves's biography of Kennedy recounts how the president was outraged when *Time* correspondent Hugh Sidey misreported that Kennedy had posed for the cover of *GQ*. "In a slick symposium of the latest men's fashions, was a specially posed photograph of President Kennedy himself, modelling a trimly tailored dark grey suit," Sidey had written. In fact, *GQ* had used a stock photo of the president. "I never posed for any picture," Kennedy snapped at Sidey. "Anybody who read this would think I was crazy." No longer. Today, any politician who would reject the benefits of celebrity would be crazy. In this, the press has been a willing accomplice. The real problem is how similar *George* is to the rest of the media, not how different. □

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RICHARD H. PILDES

Racial Redistricting Redux

Carol Swain provides a much needed independent voice on racial-redistricting debates, but "The Future of Black Representation" (Fall 1995) obscures the genuine poignancy of the underlying conflicts by conflating two distinct issues. Swain celebrates the Supreme Court's recent controversial holding in *Miller v. Johnson* that race cannot be "the predominant factor" in districting (absent compelling justification). In her unqualified enthusiasm, she argues that the decision will neither diminish black influence in congressional elections nor "doom" black candidates for Congress.

But these are quite different matters and her celebration is made too easy by the way she disingenuously blurs them together. On the first point, I agree that the best evidence increasingly shows that the creation of black-majority districts is, in an important sense, politically counterproductive; the effect of these districts is to make other districts more white, more Republican, and more conservative. On balance, the net effect appears to be that legislative bodies are made more Republican and more conservative even as more black representatives are elected. The policies most black voters support become more difficult to enact, not less, as more black-majority districts get created.

But on the second point, Swain is wrong. Careful systematic studies have shown that the elimination of black-majority districts will make it unlikely that more than a few isolated black candidates will be elected. Like others who understate the continuing extent of racially polarized voting, Swain points to a handful of noteworthy exceptions, such as Ronald Dellums, Alan Wheat, Bill Clay, Gary Franks, and J.C. Watts, to support her claim that "white voters in congressional elections will support black candidates." Even on these isolated examples, Swain is misleading; Clay's current district had a 52 percent black

population (48 percent black voting-age population) when he was elected in 1992 and is more black now, while Dellums's mixed district of blacks, Hispanics, and Asians has only a 29 percent white voting population.

But more importantly, Swain ignores the comprehensive studies that document precisely how exceptional her anecdotes are. For example, *Quiet Revolution in the South*, the monumental work edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson, demonstrates that around 1 percent of majority-white election districts in the South elect black candidates, despite an average black population of 25 percent in this region. In other words, absent districts in which black voters constitute the majority, about 1 percent of political offices at all levels—city councils, state legislatures, congressional seats—would be filled by black office holders in the South. Similar studies yield similar results for congressional districts nationwide: About 1 percent of majority-white districts have elected blacks to Congress over the last 20 years. Given the superb, comprehensive work social scientists have completed in recent years on patterns of racial polarization in voting, academics have no excuse for continuing to rely on isolated anecdotes—particularly unrepresentative ones that are so misleading.

Increasingly, it seems clear that from the perspective of black voters, racial redistricting poses profound, even tragic, conflicts. In my view, academics ought to help public debate confront these conflicts candidly, rather than gloss over them in a Panglossian pretense that abandoning racial redistricting will come at no cost. Race-conscious districting continues to be necessary if black office holders are going to be elected in greater than token numbers. But race-conscious districting probably hurts the Democratic Party

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and makes it less likely that the policies most black voters appear to want will be enacted. For this last reason, Swain is opposed to racial redistricting, and she might well be right. But she advances neither her cause nor public discussion by failing to acknowledge the genuine trade-offs that must be grasped before the problem of race-conscious districting can properly be confronted.

JAMIN B. RASKIN

Bad History, Bad Politics

Carol M. Swain articulates the conventional wisdom hostile to majority-black and Hispanic districts, inviting us to embrace three interlocking assertions: (1) the Supreme Court's decisions that majority-black and Hispanic districts presumptively violate the civil rights of whites are compelled by law and have nothing to do with racism; (2) these decisions will not result in the loss of effective minority representation in Congress or the states; and (3) the Democratic Party will benefit from invalidation of such districts since they now drain Democratic votes from neighboring districts. Swain concludes that *Miller v. Johnson*, the Court decision striking down a Georgia congressional district, is "good for the Democratic Party, good for the Congressional Black Caucus, and good for the vast majority of African Americans" But her argument collapses bad law and bad history into bad politics.

Swain obscures the Court's radical departure from precedent when it handed down *Shaw v. Reno* in 1993. White voters in that case challenged two majority-black congressional districts in North Carolina that had elected the first blacks sent to the House from the state since 1901. In her majority opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor invented a new aesthetic standard to judge such cases, ruling that strict scrutiny under the 14th Amendment applies to majority-black or Hispanic districts that have a "bizarre" appearance on the map. Such dis-

tricts, she wrote, "bear an uncomfortable resemblance to political apartheid" and must be presumed, absent a compelling state interest, to be "racial gerrymanders" violative of equal protection.

Never before had the Court held that equal protection required districts to have a specific shape, perimeter, compactness, or density. Redistricting was always a political question for the states. The Rehnquist Court had always been adamant that black plaintiffs alleging vote dilution demonstrate a concrete injury caused by government. Yet here there was no injury. Every white citizen in North Carolina still enjoyed the right to vote, run for office, organize, and lobby. Moreover, whites in North Carolina, who make up 79 percent of the state's population, still had absolute majorities—and elected white representatives—in 10 out of 12 of the state's congressional districts. There was no purposeful or effective dilution of the white vote, the injury traditionally required for voting-rights violations under the 14th Amendment.

In *Miller v. Johnson*, the Court dropped the *Shaw* requirement that white plaintiffs show bizarreness in district lines, replacing it with a new doctrine that legislative redistricting is unlawful if "race was the overriding and predominant force in the districting determination." Here, "race" does not apply to 50 majority-white legislatures creating oddly shaped majority-white districts. Racial factors seem to come explicitly to the fore only when legislators acknowledge their obligation under the Voting Rights Act to fashion majority-black and Hispanic districts to remedy minority vote dilution and racially polarized voting in the past. But that statutory requirement has now been destroyed by the Rehnquist Court.

White voters and losing Republican candidates have now filed suit against integrated House districts in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia. Dozens more state and local legislative districts hang on a thread. Swain assures us that critics have "greatly overstated" the likely impact on "minority representatives." But consider these cold facts: Of the 30 African Americans serving in the U.S. House, only three were elected by majority-white districts and two of those are Republicans, Gary Franks and J.C. Watts. There is not a single black member of the House elected from a majority-white district in the South. Indeed, before 1990, when the Voting Rights Act doubled the number of majority-

black and Hispanic congressional districts, there had been no black congressmen elected from Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, or Virginia since Reconstruction. These five states now have eight (imperiled) black representatives. Had majority-black districts not been created, these five southern states, all with large black populations, would probably have gone the distance of the twentieth century without electing a single black to Congress. If the new district lines are repudiated by the Court, the South could lose all 17 of its black representatives, setting the region back politically to 1970, when the southern delegation was lily-white.

To assess the effects of racial bloc voting by whites today, consider the case of Congressman Cleo Fields of Louisiana, a state where no black has ever been elected to Congress or the legislature from a majority-white district and no black has ever held statewide office. A three-judge panel struck down Fields's newly drawn 55 percent black district last July. The court abolished his district and replaced it with a majority-white district, which prompted State Representative David Duke to praise the court and announce plans to run for the seat if the Supreme Court okays the plan. Meanwhile, the energetic Fields decided to declare his candidacy for governor and made it into the general election runoff against a mediocre Democrat-turned-Republican opponent. In a state where Democrats are more than 70 percent of the electorate, one might suppose that he would have been a shoo-in, but white Democrats lined up behind his Republican opponent and gave that opponent a giant margin of victory. Political scientist David Bositis studied the November election returns in Fields's last House race and found that, in every majority white precinct—even where Democrats were upwards of 80 percent of registered voters—the incumbent Fields lost by a huge margin to an unknown white Republican who had recently moved to the state and was not even endorsed by the Republican Party.

But Swain supports throwing black incumbents into majority-white districts because she puts an explicitly partisan agenda first. She is convinced the Democratic Party's loss of the House in 1994 is

due to majority-black districts. It's a curious conviction: Democrats in 1994 also lost the Senate where there are no majority-black districts getting in the way, and almost all of the evidence about the House is to the contrary. The majority-black districts that allegedly caused the 15-seat Republican majority in 1994 must also have caused the 41-seat Democratic majority in 1992 since they were all in place by then. Moreover, Professor Allan Lichtman has shown that Democrats actually performed better in the nine states with new majority-black districts than in the 41 without and that, even had there been no Democratic losses in those nine states, the Democrats would have lost their House majority anyway.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund's analysis of the 54 House districts the Democrats lost in 1994 decisively refutes Swain's argument. Of the 54 seats lost, 24 were in states where all of the districts are majority-white and 15 are surrounded completely by neighboring majority-white districts. Of the remaining 15 districts, eight are districts where the

The Democratic Party's problem in 1994 was not the location of black voters.

proportion of minority voters actually increased or stayed the same. Of the remaining seven districts that did lose minority voters to neighboring districts, one race was lost by Dan Rostenkowski, who was facing a federal criminal prosecution. Thus, there were only six districts in the country where Swain's thesis is even plausible, but the Fund's report makes a much stronger case that the creation of majority-black districts

saved Democratic seats during the Republican landslide and that, had black majorities been redistributed to other districts in Mississippi and Georgia, the Democrats would have lost more seats because of lopsided white support garnered by Republicans. In Texas, the Democratic legislature was able to capture all three of the state's new House districts through use of the Voting Rights Act.

The Democratic Party's problem in 1994 elections was not the location of black voters. The problem was that declining wages, sinking living standards, and growing wage inequality left vast numbers of Americans in despair about their lives. Without a populist political narrative to push them in a progressive direction, many white citizens will fall for conservative rhetoric and racial politics in

times like these. Academics should resist the temptation to blame minority political power for the failure of leading Democrats to define a public agenda for working-class Americans.

CAROL M. SWAIN
RESPONDS:

Law professors Jamie Raskin and Richard Pildes have responded to my article, "The Future of Black Representation," with the hyperbole that characterizes some of the rhetoric of recent debate about voting rights. In the process, these authors, especially Raskin, have distorted not only the content of my article, but also my motives.

Raskin argues erroneously that I have said that "majority-black and Hispanic districts violate the civil rights of whites [and] are compelled by law and have nothing to do with racism." This statement is absurd. If Raskin had bothered to read my article more carefully, he would have noticed that I never said any such thing.

Pildes does a much better job of examining my arguments, but he misrepresents the intent and tone of the piece. I did not write the article to celebrate the *Miller v. Johnson* decision. Rather, it was written as a reflection on the trade-offs associated with strategies that increase the descriptive representation of black office holders while reducing the number of allies that they can count on. Racial gerrymandering has had unintended deleterious effects on the political representation of African Americans. Although their numbers in Congress have never been higher, black representatives have never been weaker.

Raskin defends the NAACP Legal Defense Fund study that claims that race-conscious districting had nothing to do with the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives. David Bositis (Joint Center for Political Studies), David Lublin (University of South Carolina), and Charles Bullock (University of Georgia) have documented the losses suffered by Democrats in 1992 and 1994 that can be traced to race-conscious districting. Lublin's study, for instance, addresses the problems in the LDF's statistical study.

While race-conscious districting helped increase the number of blacks in legislative bodies, it has also made possible Republican takeovers of several state legislatures and the House of Representatives. Five Democratic defeats in 1992 and no fewer than 12 in 1994 can be traced to race-conscious districting. Since 1992, at least 137 Democrats have switched parties, including three House members who have switched since the 1994 elections.

Pildes and Raskin question my optimism about the potential of electing more black politicians in white-majority legislative districts. To bolster their position, they rely on overall population instead of voting-age population as a basis for their claims. The number of blacks elected from nonwhite districts increases noticeably, however, when voting age-population is the measure. Before the race-conscious districting of the 1990s, 40 percent of the blacks in Congress were elected from nonblack districts—either majority-white districts or those where the combined minority population exceeded 50 percent. Currently 11 black incumbents represent districts that have nonblack majorities and eight represent districts where the black voting-age population is barely in the majority. Eleven blacks represent districts with more than 60 percent black voting-age populations. Given lower black registration and turnout levels, some of the representatives of nonblack and barely black districts have majority-white electorates on election day. Still, black office holders are getting reelected.

Some liberal scholars fail to think through the implications of their positions and how they could affect those wards they purport to speak for. The *Miller* decision is not on par with *Dred Scott v. Sanford* or *Plessy v. Ferguson*. It does not jeopardize the seats of most black incumbents, although it might make it more difficult for some to be reelected. The Court in *Miller* did not authorize white officials to return to the practice of gerrymandering to dilute minority voting strength. And most important, the *Miller* decision does not overrule the no-retrogression standard of *Beer v. United States*. Even if the Court had upheld the Georgia district and approved race-conscious districting enthusiastically, the strategy of grouping black voters into the same district to elect blacks to Congress had nearly been exhausted. If black voters are to be better represented in Congress, racial gerrymandering is not the way. □

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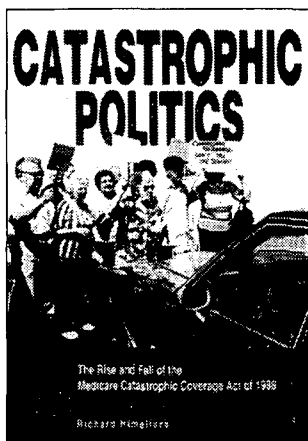
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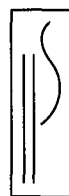
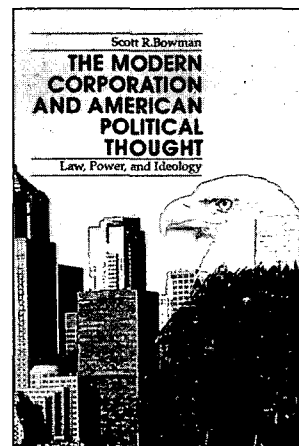
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SIMON SAYS

To the Editors:

Professor Kathleen Sullivan makes a convincing case for why constitutional amendments are generally a bad idea ("Constitutional Amendmentitis," Fall 1995). I agree with many of her arguments about why our Constitution should be extraordinarily difficult to amend.

Professor Sullivan does support constitutional amendments that correct structural biases in ordinary legislation, but she denies the existence of such a bias against budgetary self-discipline that is imposing debt on future generations. She writes that "[i]f any group can be said to have virtual representation in the Congress, it is surely our own children and grandchildren."

As a member of Congress who has watched our per capita debt grow from \$2,500 in 1975 to \$18,000 today for every U.S. man, woman, and child, I respectfully differ. Our children's future is in real peril, and their rights are unprotected. What we are now doing with our budget is "taxation without representation." We are living on a huge credit card and sending the bill to our children and grandchildren.

If the debt continues to grow as

projected, the United States government will eventually "solve" its problem as have all other nations that have accumulated massive indebtedness: by monetizing the debt—printing more money and devaluing the dollar. Historically, this "solution" has led to economic and political chaos. While Professor Sullivan's concern that amendments are difficult to repeal is valid, history is even more difficult to repeal.

In 1798, Thomas Jefferson wrote,

I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our constitution. I would be willing to depend on that alone for the reduction of the administration of our government to the genuine principles of its constitution: I mean an additional article, taking from the federal government the power of borrowing.

Even the lead witness against the amendment in a 1992 hearing, Professor Laurence Tribe of Harvard, said:

Despite the misgivings I expressed on this score a decade ago, I no longer think that a balanced budget amendment is, at a conceptual level, an ill-suited kind of provision to include in the Constitution. . . . The Jeffersonian notion that today's populace should not be able to burden future generations with excessive debt does seem to be the kind of fundamental value that is worthy of enshrinement in the Constitution. In a sense, it represents a structural protection of our children and grandchildren.

The time has come to follow Thomas Jefferson's advice. The balanced budget amendment, which protects future generations from abusive deficits of the past, is a fitting addition to the document that protects our fundamental rights as citizens.

Senator Paul Simon
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Simon is the Senate's chief Democratic sponsor of the balanced budget amendment.

KATHLEEN M. SULLIVAN RESPONDS:

Senator Simon argues that the balanced budget amendment, which he has long supported, would protect future generations from debts imposed by current majorities. He is right that this represents the best argument for the amendment. But a constitutional amendment is neither necessary nor sufficient to achieve that goal. It is not necessary because the political branches are perfectly capable, under the existing constitutional structure, of cutting spending and raising revenues to achieve a balanced budget. Indeed they are currently doing just that—however one might disagree with their notions of distribution. And a budget amendment is not sufficient because, even if passed, it would still require exactly such an exercise of political will. Thus it would add nothing to the Constitution except exhortation—unless it were interpreted to grant the president or the courts unprecedented fiscal power that would ultimately weaken Congress and destabilize the national government. Future generations should be protected against unsustainable debt by political leadership such as Senator Simon's, not by constitutional draftmanship.

The American Prospect welcomes correspondence. Brief letters of up to 250 words are preferred and stand a better chance of being published. Letters must include the writer's name, address, and telephone number and may be edited for length. Send letters to *The American Prospect*, P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, MA 02238, or via e-mail to tap@epn.org.

NEW ECONOMY, OLD PROBLEMS

To the Editors:

I was troubled by "Nice Work If You Can Get It" (Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Fall 1995). Its celebratory tone towards the brave new world of networking and continuous learning would be more at home in a book by Alvin Toffler or something else with the imprimatur of Newt Gingrich. At the very least I would have expected you to run it with a companion piece opposing its slant, as you have done in the past with articles about, for example, the "New Democrats."

Buried here and there in Kanter's article were somewhat critical comments, such as the one about how employment in this "Hollywood star" system is fine until you become a fading star. There were also some ominous remarks about what will become of the new software Masters of the Universe once consolidation hits the industry and they find themselves faced with a few large employers controlling the market for their services. But these themes are never developed, and most of the piece amounted to a breathless description of a wonderful new model that is becoming the Wave of the Future, which will either carry us along or wash us away: The message is that we obviously have no other choices.

I find it interesting to contrast Kanter's perspective with that of a colleague of hers, Harvard Business School professor Howard Stevenson, whose reflections on similar workplace trends are published in (of all places!) a recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review*. Stevenson makes the point that people expect and require a certain level of predictability in their work environment. He argues that high-quality production of goods and services

demands a level of commitment toward workers manifested by employers such as the ones Kanter describes. Thus, such employers are in effect living off the accumulated cultural capital of workers prepared to commit themselves to their jobs, while their laissez-faire policies toward their employees eat away at that resource.

Are you sure that the submissions to *HBR* and *TAP* didn't get mixed up in the mail last month?

Charles A. Nichols, III
Cambridge, Massachusetts

ROSABETH MOSS KANTER RESPONDS:

I am well aware of the pitfalls in the software industry jobs model, as Mr. Nichols's own reprise of my critique makes clear. But it would be equally faulty to write off the positive side. Software companies, along with high-tech role models such as Hewlett-Packard or Raychem, are not deliberately seeking disposable employees or laissez-faire personnel policies (as some corporate giants in other industries are doing); they are actively seeking the best ways to attract, motivate, and reward the best talent because they know their success depends on brainpower. Raychem's highly regarded career-development program stresses "career self reliance"; people who go through the program to become more "employable" within the company or elsewhere often end up with better jobs at Raychem. Thus, stressing the human capital formation aspects of "employability security" can result in the old-fashioned kind of long-term commitment, even if it cannot be guaranteed in advance.

Between the extremes of an unsustainable full-commitment model of the lifetime employment variety, and an unacceptable contin-

gency model of a disposable workforce left to flounder on their own, there needs to be a third way.

By documenting actual practices in the software industry, I wanted *TAP* readers to consider such an alternative and whether aspects of it can be adapted to other industries to the benefit of workers. My article was based on the hardheaded empirical research for my book, *World Class*, which included extensive worker interviews and was neither breathless nor idealistic.

"A Journal for the Liberal Imagination" is in danger of unimaginatively embracing orthodoxy if all it does is decry change or assume that just because the political "enemy" also notes certain trends, then those trends must be uniformly bad. Imagining a better society begins with exploring new realities while adhering to enduring pro-people values.

To the Editors:

Lawrence Mishel's article, "Rising Tides, Sinking Wages" (Fall 1995), gets an "A" until the sentence: "The macroeconomic effect of balancing the budget and reducing the deficit will be to slow economic growth over the next ten years," which deserves a "C."

The question of balancing the budget is separate from how it is to be done. Balancing the budget, or better, running a surplus, makes its contribution to equalizing income distribution in two distinct ways: (a) it increases the supply of loanable funds, thus reducing long-term interest rates; and (b) it reduces incomes of holders of fixed-income securities, largely the rich.

The reduction of interest rates greatly improves the chances of a revival in home building, factory construction, and public infrastructure financed by the states. It thus

raises employment and increases the bargaining power of workers. Mishel is correct on the productivity effect, which is long-term.

Monroe Burk
Columbia, Maryland

LAWRENCE MISHEL RESPONDS:

Thanks for the high grade, but please, no demerits for saying deficit reduction slows overall growth. The commitment to balancing the budget will certainly deepen any recession that comes over the next ten years, as one surely will. If one wants to reduce interest rates and the returns to assets, the easiest and simplest policy (it only requires political courage) is for the Federal Reserve Board to loosen its monetary grip, a policy clearly justified by the lack of wage acceleration over the last year.

Deficit reduction since 1993, on the other hand, has not brought us any investment boom. This should not be surprising because a deficit reduction strategy is, at best, a weak and uncertain growth strategy. Lower deficits are not strongly relat-

ed to lower interest rates. Investment is not driven by interest rates to any large degree. Plus, investment contributes relatively little (15 to 25 percent) to productivity growth. More important, however, is that United States (and European) business is now enjoying record profit rates so there is already plenty of economic incentive to invest.

I remain curious, therefore, why the growth strategies of both the Clinton administration and the GOP are premised on providing further financial incentives for investors—lower interest rates via deficit reduction for the White House, and deregulation (weakening EPA and OSHA) and lower taxes for the GOP. After all, even with record-high profits (before- or after-tax) we are not seeing remarkable investment or productivity growth.

To the Editors:

The articles "Nice Work If You Can Get It" (Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Fall 1995), "Rising Tides, Sinking Wages," (Lawrence Mishel, Fall 1995), and "Who Deserted the

Democrats in 1994?" (Ruy A. Teixeira and Joel Rogers, Fall 1995) were useful for those of us who might have come to the same conclusions intuitively, but lacked the motivation to do the research to back up those conclusions.

The quality of our civilization is only tenuously and indirectly related to the health of our economy. Increased corporate profits and a growing GNP do not necessarily mean more and better jobs for citizens. As we are seeing today, they can mean just the opposite.

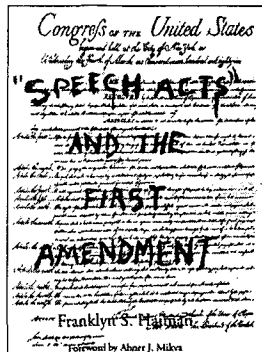
As our economy becomes more nationalized, we can expect to see a leveling between our economy and those we refer to as "third world" economies. The idealists predict that this will mean that "third world" economies will look like ours—or what ours looked like in the 1950s and 1960s. The realists know the opposite is far more likely—that the leveling means our economy will take on the characteristics of a "third world" economy. There will be a greater concentration of wealth among those at the top, a shrinking of the middle class, and an explosion in the growth of the number of "have-nots" at the bottom.

As your columnists observed or implied, when job prospects are perceived as looking up, we are open-handed with our purses and tolerant of differences with our neighbors. As we perceive the job prospects as no longer positive, our purses snap shut and our neighbors begin to get on our nerves. We vote for Proposition 13 and its ilk and we call our lawyer when our neighbor's dog demonstrates an interest in our begonia bed. We will survive, but things will get a lot meaner before we figure out how to make a free-market economy serve us rather than have us serve it.

Earl Gates
Decatur, Illinois

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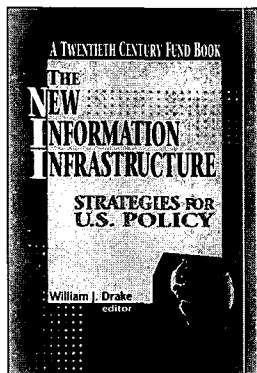
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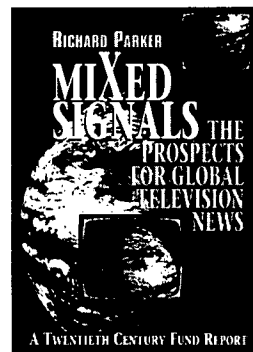
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THE POPULIST ROAD TO HELL

TERM LIMITS IN CALIFORNIA

BY PETER SCHRAG

There are all sorts of ironies in the term-limits movement that has swept the country in the past six years. The most obvious is that while Congress has been the prime target, it is the state legislatures that have (so far) taken the hit—some 20 states have imposed legislative term limits in the past six years, all but one through the initiative. And while generally regarded as populist, the term-limits cause in some states has depended on a few conservative deep pockets, such as Kansas oil billionaires Charles and David Koch. In California, the deep pockets were those of a conservative Los Angeles politician, Pete Schabarum, who recently retired after five years as a legislator and 19 years as a county supervisor—no term limits for him. Since the law prevented Schabarum from keeping for himself the \$1 million-plus he still had in his campaign treasury, he decided he would use it to buy his fellow citizens a term-limits initiative.

Term limits were not, in other words, just the result of a wild round of coincidental dissatisfaction that happened to sweep every state that had the initiative in its constitution. The legislatures of Maine and California, Ohio and Idaho, Oklahoma and Michigan, didn't all turn into swamps of iniquity at the same time. But since qualifications for Congress, as the Supreme Court recently reaffirmed, are established in the Constitution—states cannot tinker with them. So it was the state legislatures that got hit and it's in the states that term limits have stuck.

Another source of irony, perhaps the most significant, is that just as term limits begin to bite, Congress is about to turn a vast range of highly complex social policies—welfare, Medicaid, food stamps—into block grants, transferring responsibility to those same state legislatures, many of which will no longer have senior members with more than six or eight years in office. And so by some strange working of the popular will, the country will take some of government's toughest decisions out of the hands of legislators with long experience and deliver them into the hands of amateurs.

California's recent experience may signal what we can expect: gridlock, bitter partisan hostility, and greater reliance on special interests for the expertise required to write complex legislation.

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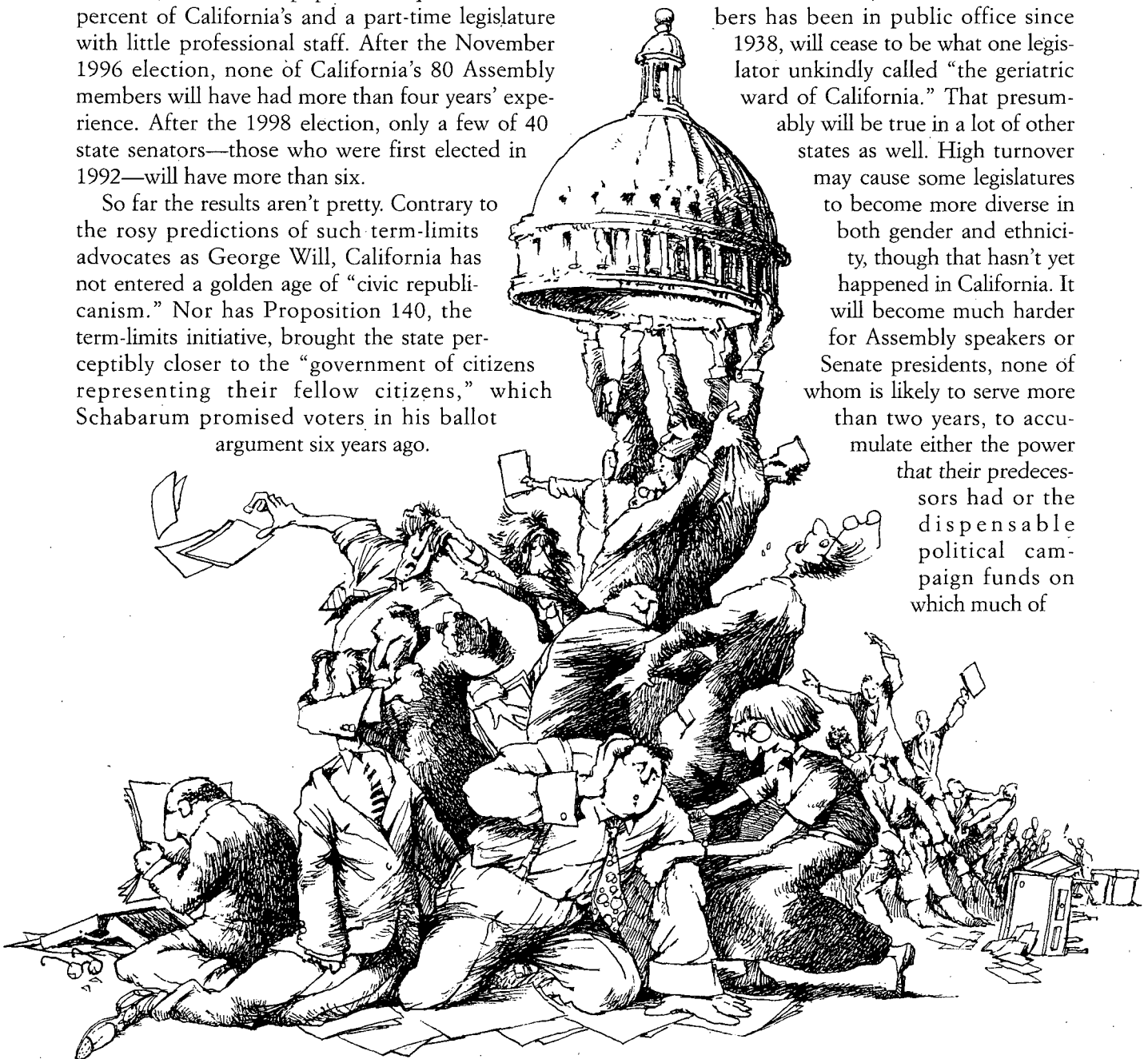
BITTER FRUIT

In November 1990, California became one of the first of the 20 states to adopt term limits—three two-year terms in a lifetime for the state Assembly, two four-year terms for the state Senate. And because its limits are among the most stringent, virtually all the state's legislators will be, as the phrase goes, "termed out" at the end of 1996. Thus California once again becomes the first major test of yet another grand plebiscitary experiment. The only other state where term limits kick in this year is Maine, which has a population equal to about 3 percent of California's and a part-time legislature with little professional staff. After the November 1996 election, none of California's 80 Assembly members will have had more than four years' experience. After the 1998 election, only a few of 40 state senators—those who were first elected in 1992—will have more than six.

So far the results aren't pretty. Contrary to the rosy predictions of such term-limits advocates as George Will, California has not entered a golden age of "civic republicanism." Nor has Proposition 140, the term-limits initiative, brought the state perceptibly closer to the "government of citizens representing their fellow citizens," which Schabarum promised voters in his ballot argument six years ago.

Nor has it done much, quoting the ballot argument again, to "remove the grip that vested interests have over the legislature [and] put an end to the Sacramento web of special favors and patronage." What it has done is send a new generation of politicians to Sacramento who are long on partisanship and painfully short on both legislative experience and policy background—and, worse, often seem not to care.

That's not to say that the proponents were all wrong. Because of term limits, the California Senate, one of whose members has been in public office since 1938, will cease to be what one legislator unkindly called "the geriatric ward of California." That presumably will be true in a lot of other states as well. High turnover may cause some legislatures to become more diverse in both gender and ethnicity, though that hasn't yet happened in California. It will become much harder for Assembly speakers or Senate presidents, none of whom is likely to serve more than two years, to accumulate either the power that their predecessors had or the dispensable political campaign funds on which much of



that power was based. The personal arrogance and indifference of some long-term members may become a thing of the past.

But anyone looking for a new generation of citizen-legislators will probably look in vain. By general agreement, the 1995 session of the California legislature was probably the most mean-spirited and unproductive in memory, a unique combination of instability, bad behavior, political frenzy, and legislative paralysis. In the past year, California has had three Assembly speakers, two Republican Assembly leaders, two Republican Senate leaders, and six special elections, not counting runoffs. These included three recalls and there will almost certainly be more before the 1996 general election. In effect, we've witnessed an accelerating game of musical chairs prompted by the search of the nearly termed-out for jobs of longer and more secure tenure: as lobbyists, consultants, or academics, or in other public offices. That, in turn, has produced an almost continuous battle over the speakership and with it an unprecedented round of fratricidal vendettas stemming from the attempts of a group of clumsy and inexperienced Assembly Republicans to punish those who were insufficiently loyal to their caucus.

CALIFORNIA SCHEMING

A short reprise: In November of 1994, Republican Senator Marian Bergeson, a ten-year veteran of the legislature, knowing she must leave office by 1996, runs for, and wins, a seat on the Orange County Board of Supervisors, thereby setting up a special election in March that's won, after a runoff in June, by Republican Assemblyman Ross Johnson. This leaves a vacancy in the Assembly, prompting another special election, held in September. In the meantime, Republican Assemblyman Dick Mountjoy, who would have been termed out in 1996 and is looking for a place with more potential, has won a special election for the Senate seat vacated by Senator Frank Hill, who was removed from office in the summer of 1994 after his conviction on a bribery charge. But because of a closely divided Assembly, and a quirk in state law, Mountjoy delays giving up his Assembly seat even after his Senate victory so that he can cast his vote for a Republican speaker.

In the course of that maneuvering, the Republicans become so paranoid about the ability of the longtime Democratic speaker, Willie Brown, to outfox them that one of their members, a former

sheriff's deputy named Larry Bowler, cuts the wires of the internal microphones in the caucus chamber where they meet out of fear that Democrats might be listening in. Eventually, in what Republicans call a coup, the Democrats, with the help of one Republican defector, Assemblyman Paul Horcher, oust Senator/Assemblyman Mountjoy from the Assembly and return Brown to the speaker's chair. Mountjoy's Assembly seat is thereupon filled in yet another special election.

In anger and revenge, Republicans organize a successful voter recall against the defecting Horcher, who is replaced by Assemblyman Gary Miller. The Republicans also organize a recall against Assemblyman Mike Machado, a Democrat, whom they accuse of breaking a promise not to vote for the Democratic speaker. That recall fails miserably, and Machado files an \$800,000 claim with the state, not yet settled, under a law allowing public reimbursement of expenses to the survivor of a recall. In the meantime, Willie Brown, who also will be termed out in 1996 and is now running for mayor of San Francisco, steps down as speaker, but since Republican Assemblywoman Doris Allen is angry at the way she's been treated by the leaders of her caucus, she, like Horcher before her, refuses to vote for the Republican leader, Jim Brulte. (Also termed out, she seems to feel no fealty to her caucus.) Instead, she allows herself to be elected speaker of the nearly evenly divided house with the unanimous votes of the Democrats, plus her own vote, over the unanimous opposition of her Republican colleagues. Allen thus becomes the target of yet another GOP recall, which takes place in November 1995. By September, having succumbed to the harassment and invective of her GOP colleagues, she resigns the speakership, but not before she manages to describe them, in one very public statement, as "power-mongering males with short penises." It was that kind of year.

THE COST OF LIMITS

This chain of intrigue and conflict—and the resulting legislative gridlock and partisan hostility—would probably not have been half as severe had it not been for another development: a legislative redistricting by judicially appointed special masters after the 1990 census that so evenly divided districts that it was hard for either party to get undisputed control of the lower house. If we were living in a less ideologically unforgiving time or

place, there might also have been more compromise and professional respect among the members.

But term limits themselves send the message that experience is not as important as ideological purity and faithful representation of the voters of one's district. Government, said Phil Isenberg, a pragmatic Democratic assemblyman and one of the legislature's most thoughtful members, who will himself be termed out in 1996, is not "like filling sandbags in the flood"—something that a citizen does on a temporary basis and then returns to normal life. During much of 1994, Willie Brown, who has been in the Assembly for more than 30 years and was its speaker for 15, tried to train a new generation of Democratic leaders—potential speakers, chairs of key committees, and all the rest. But the effort seems to have had only marginal success at best; no one who has been there four years or less has learned enough about California's complicated system of government. Under term limits, moreover, the payoff is so limited. Who wants to stay up all night learning brain surgery when he can only practice for two years? Therefore, Brown told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Daniel Weintraub, there is going to be no "central force, no central person, who is really responsible or accountable, everyone just doing their own little number." Next year, the fights among Democrats may become as fractious as those among Republicans.

The effects will be less severe in the Senate, with its eight-year limits and its complement of members who previously served in the Assembly—and still less true in states like Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah, which have 12-year limits for each house of their legislatures, longer than the average term is now. "The legislative process is remarkably adaptable and resilient," writes Douglas G. Brown, the director of Colorado's Office of Legislative Legal Services, about the likely effects of reforms in that state. But he does not minimize the dangers: "Experienced members know that disagreement is the default position and agreement takes time and compromise and education to achieve. Experienced members can reason by analogy from previous experiences; new members will not know the lessons of the past."

Bill Lockyer, California's Senate president, puts

Who wants
to stay up all
night learning
brain surgery
when he can
only practice
for two years?

it another way: New members arrive "convinced that those people (already in government) have screwed it all up: I'm going to fix it, whatever it is. [But after a while] people tend to meet smart people with different values . . . and they start to say 'Maybe I'm not absolutely right about this.'" With term limits, that is far less likely to happen.

What is certain, at least in California, is that term limits have increased instability and reduced legislative experience. Under the state's rigid limits, members begin looking for the next slot from the moment they arrive. The legislature has, in effect, become a bus station where some people have just arrived and others are waiting to leave, and as a result the institution itself does not elicit much loyalty or devotion. In the two-year period between the 1992 and 1994 elections, California had 12 special elections—that's 10 percent of all seats.

More than \$10 million was spent on these races—more per race than the obscene amounts, now approaching a total of \$80 million every two years, spent in regular legislative elections. In addition, it costs the taxpayers of each affected district an estimated \$300,000 to \$500,000 to run each of these special elections. 'We are probably already ahead of that pace in this cycle, though exact figures are not yet available, and since there are still 24 Assembly members and 12 senators who will be termed out by the end of this year, the cycle is far from over. The successful recall of Assemblyman Horcher cost the winners \$400,000 and the losers \$600,000. That's a little high for such a contest, but not extraordinary—and certainly not money that comes in \$5 donations raised at neighborhood teas and clambakes. This year, for the first time, as California Common Cause director Ruth Holton observed, political candidates are holding fundraisers in Sacramento—which means that they're shaking down the special interests—even before they're elected.

POLITICAL PARALYSIS

It's too soon to know conclusively how all that will affect policy and the quality of government generally. There's little question that, as the sponsors of California's term limits promised, the flow of money, particularly to members of the Assembly, will be less subject to the control of a powerful speaker like

Brown. There simply isn't time for anyone to develop the long-term relationships that Brown, for better or worse, managed with trial lawyers, public employee unions, land developers, and other major lobbies. The Assembly's speaker at the end of the 1995 session was a 32-year-old freshman Republican named Brian Setencich, a former professional basketball player in Europe, who had been in the legislature less than eight months and whose prior political experience was a few years on the Fresno City Council. For the same reason, it will also be hard for anyone to develop the clout to broker deals among various interest groups—which are now increasingly trying to work their own deals directly with individual members—or to keep caucus members in line.

That will make it even harder than it has recently been in California to hold votes together and enact any major legislation—indeed, to do anything that takes patient compromise and thus requires the luxury of time and a relatively stable group of bargainers. In the process, it's not only politically complex and divisive issues that have bogged down in California's fractured legislature. Even such matters as the two-thirds vote to place school construction bonds on the state ballot—a vote that was once routine for both Republicans and Democrats—have become increasingly insurmountable hurdles. This summer, for the second time in two years, no school bond measure was approved, despite the fact that California's classrooms are the most crowded and among the most dilapidated in America.

But the changing power relationships are only one element contributing to California's policy paralysis. What is at least as important is the declining level of policy experience that term limits foster and celebrate. The California legislature once had a highly professional staff, but the term-limits initiative also required a 40 percent reduction in legislative personnel and funding.

Here again is an example of unintended consequences. Most observers agree that for years there had been too many political hacks on legislative payrolls, men and women earning six-figure salaries and cushy pensions to organize fundraisers, staff campaigns, and talk to lobbyists. But the initiative did little to reduce the number of hacks

who, in the constant search for money, are needed more than ever. The damage, rather, was done in the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's office, which studies and evaluates the fiscal effects of the budget and all money bills. The office lost 60 percent of its staff. The budget reductions also decimated the ranks of policy experts attached to various legislative committees—experts on budgeting, water law, taxation, environmental law, education, transportation, and all the rest—who, for the better part of a generation beginning in the mid-1960s,

had made California's legislature a model of professionalism. Until 1990, someone from the Legislative Analyst's office appeared and testified at hearings on all major revenue and appropriations bills; after the office's budget was cut, that was no longer possible.

There also appears to have been a marked decline in the quality of the work done by committee policy staff, partly because they were shorthanded and partly because the new members seemed to care less. Previously, committee bill analyses were, for the most part, objective statements that laid out the arguments on a bill, pro and con, raised unanswered questions, and tried to suggest the likely effects. Now, they tend increasingly to be taken verbatim from the lobbyists pushing or opposing the measure, or simply from fantasy. That practice seems not to reflect corruption so much as the cult-politics mindset of people who fervently believe that if they hold the correct position on an issue no further information is required. They are not in Sacramento to govern; they are there to enact the agenda that they arrived with.

For example, analysis of a bill authorizing a bond issue to buy computers and other new technology for California schools—probably a dubious way of funding such inherently perishable improvements—cited “serious concerns . . . in the technology community regarding overuse of computers by young children. Scientific reports reveal that, as with TV, there is actual physiological damage and impairment to the areas of young children's brains which involve metaphorical thinking and other avenues to higher thinking skills.” So far, no one has found those scientific reports, but since this analysis was written for a legislator who once announced that the Air Force had an official witch,

Accountability
has become so
entangled that
the buck never
stops.

no one really expected to. Because term limits leave everyone insecure, said one member, "this place has become a totally risk-averse environment, which is why you have so much stridency and so little achievement."

The winners from term limits will be, first, the lobbyists, who are never termed out; second, the governor and the executive branch, which still has budgeting and policymaking expertise; and, third, the bureaucrats, who will stay long after legislators go. Art Agnos, a former legislator and former mayor of San Francisco, now western regional director for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, recently remarked that the real effect of term limits is that "no one will be in office long enough to touch the bureaucrats. . . . They tell us political appointees—the politocrats—that while we're the A team, they're the B team: 'We be here when you come and we be here after you're gone.'"

CYCLES OF FRUSTRATION

California has been on a plebiscitary rampage since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978; term limits are not likely to be the end of the process. For most of the past two decades, and even before, the state has been going through a continuous cycle of reform and political frustration, with initiative after initiative imposing state and local tax limitations, spending limits, a formula for school spending, term limits, three strikes, and prohibiting public education and other services for illegal immigrants (currently blocked by the federal courts). Each initiative has put still more restrictions on the ability of elected officials—legislators, city councils, school boards, county supervisors—to make choices and set priorities. As each has made it harder for the legislature to function and more difficult for voters to comprehend the system—let alone know whom to hold accountable—yet another remedial ballot measure has sprouted from the resulting frustration. This, in turn, has further restricted the latitude of those who used to be called the people's represen-

tatives, which in turn has further exacerbated the impotence of the legislature and has reduced the accountability of those whom the voters elected.

The key was Proposition 13, which not only limited the local property tax but gave the state the power to allocate property tax revenues among counties, cities, schools, and thousands of special districts. It thus severely weakened local government and shifted power to a state government whose legislature was itself being hamstrung by a set of uncoordinated populist reforms. Equally important, Proposition 13 and the scores of bills and ballot measures that followed in its wake so divided accountability between the state and the locals (and often among various state and local agencies) that even the simplest things—how to get a new school built, for example—became virtually incomprehensible. As recently demonstrated in Los Angeles, the county or the school board slipping into bankruptcy points to Sacramento for reducing its funding; the state points to the local supervisors and their managers for failing to control mushrooming employee salaries and benefits.

They are both correct. In 20 years, California's state and local governments have become a sort of Rube Goldberg machine whose most important product may well be voter alienation. It's said, probably correctly, that only three people understand California school finance, and two of them are lobbyists. More obviously, the post-13 era has been marked by a steep slide in the quality and availability of the state's public services and a sharp

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rise in the kind of political corruption—sometimes indictable, sometimes not—that thrives in an increasingly unmanageable, demoralized, and unaccountable system. Since 1988, five California legislators, several staffers, and one prominent lobbyist have been convicted on federal bribery or similar charges.

Finally, there is the huge effect of the two-thirds vote that California, almost alone among the states, requires in each house of the legislature, not only for the enactment of any tax but, more important, for approval of the annual state budget and virtually every other sort of appropriation. That gives every determined political minority—from welfare Democrats to right-to-life Republicans—the power to extract concessions from the majority, both by blocking additional spending and, in times of stress, blocking desirable spending cuts. It's no coincidence that California's legislature is so often gridlocked for weeks or even months before it can agree on a budget. With the array of new political technologies—from direct mail to television to the Internet—that have evolved since Proposition 13, it's often easier for well-organized and well-heeled

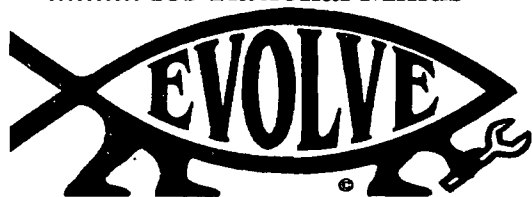
groups, on the left as well as the right, to use the initiative, once intended as the people's instrument, to write policy changes into law or into the budget than to get the legislative supermajority that the constitution requires. But it makes it almost impossible to set realistic annual budget priorities.

There is no space here to describe the inequities in tax and spending policies, the economic dislocations, and the other Alice-in-Wonderland policy distortions that this process has produced in the past two decades. In any number of places, property taxes on identical parcels in the same neighborhood are vastly different because one parcel was purchased recently (and thus reassessed), while the other has been in the same hands since 1978 and thus is carried on the rolls at 1975 values. And since local communities are now effectively precluded from taxing themselves to improve schools, California's per-pupil spending has declined from fifth or sixth in the nation to 42nd—a decline that started long before the recession that began in 1989. California is the state where accountability has become so entangled that the buck never stops and can never be traced.

Given that structural morass, the governmental inexperience that term limits produce can only exacerbate the difficulties of accomplishing anything. California Republicans have some hopes of gaining control of both houses of the state legislature in 1996—they now control one, more or less—but if they succeed, the thing they will learn first and foremost is how limited their ability is to accomplish anything substantial. The cycle of reform and frustration will go on.

Of course, California is unique in some of these things. But these days it is hardly alone in its search for quick constitutional fixes—balanced budget amendments, supermajority tax-enactment provisions, term limits and other autopilot mechanisms—in an effort to guarantee what never was and never will be: that government will do the right things without constant attention from a citizenry that seems to have less and less interest in, patience for, or attachment to, its institutions. The excesses and abuses of a distant, overprofessionalized government are legendary and need no further reiteration, but the alternative, in a world as complex as this one, is not some dreamy system of short-term amateurs. California is not so much apart as ahead, a cautionary tale that others ignore at their peril. □

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CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

BY JONATHAN COHN

*Where, where but here have Pride and Truth
That long to give themselves for wage,
To shake their wicked sides at youth
Restraining reckless middle-age?*

— W.B. Yeats

Heather, a jeans-clad 26-year-old with long curly hair, is worried about the deficit. "Last year I paid an additional \$800 in taxes just for the interest on the federal debt," she says. "At this rate, I'll be spending my whole life paying off the bills run up by our parents and grandparents." Pacing across a spacious loft high above some major city, Heather warns that it is time to balance the federal budget. "Budget deficits hurt all Americans," she says angrily, "but it's our generation that gets hit the hardest."

If you haven't seen Heather, you probably don't watch MTV. In the weeks leading up to the November budget showdown, Heather appeared frequently on the youth-oriented music video network thanks to the Coalition for Change, a consortium of four well-heeled interest groups that favor balanced budgets. Formally unveiled at a press conference at Washington's Planet Hollywood restaurant, and financed primarily by the Business Roundtable, the Heather advertisement represented the latest volley in a now-familiar campaign to cast the debate over social spending in generational terms, pitting the old—the ones who purportedly ran up the national debt—against the young—the ones who will pay the bill, or so we are told. In this script, Republicans are in the novel role as saviors of the young, determined to vanquish any whining liberals who question the conservatives' definition of fiscal responsibility.

As a means of mobilizing young deficit hawks, these efforts have been less than spectacular. Lead...or...Leave, the twentysomething lobby famous for its appearances on *Nightline* and the cover of *U.S. News and World Report*, had to close up shop early this year when it ran out of members and then money. Third Millennium, a nonprofit group financed in part by former Republican presidential advisers Pete Peterson and John Whitehead, still claims fewer than 2,000 members after three years of existence.

Yet if the efforts by groups like the Coalition for Change have not been a hit at the grass roots, they have succeeded in another, no less critical, mission: framing the public debate. Spoon-fed to a receptive media establishment by these twentysomething

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front groups, conservative think tanks, and well-paid public relations firms, generational equity has become a dominant theme of the budget battle. Among its manifestations this year was an article by Elizabeth Kolbert in the *New York Times Magazine*, warning that the budget issue boils down to a question of whether America's children will be stuck with their grandparents' bill. As if the point wasn't clear enough, *Newsweek* helpfully illustrated its "Mediscare" cover with a photo of a young man buckling under the weight of an elderly woman in a wheelchair.

What's wrong with this picture? Lots. It's a caricature to suggest that the elderly soak up all public benefits while the young's only connection to government is via the Internal Revenue Service. Without federal food and nutrition programs—the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, food stamps, school lunches—millions of low-income pregnant women and their children would grow up malnourished, as they did in America only a few decades ago. Head Start helps make kids ready for school, and like the nutrition programs, the evidence indicates that it works. Conservatives typically argue that programs for the poor affect only a small fraction of the population. But the U.S. has the highest child poverty rate of any major industrialized nation—25.3 percent of children under age six grow up in poor families. Of the 13 million Americans on welfare (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), 9 million are children. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Republican cut in the earned income tax credit (EITC) will mean that the working families of more than 23 million children will on average pay an extra \$415 annually by the year 2002. Medicaid is another instructive example. With the legal entitlements gone under the new budget, the Urban Institute estimates 4.4 million children will lose Medicaid coverage altogether, even if the states make up for some of the reduction in federal aid by cutting payments to health providers (which, in Medicaid, are not exactly munificent).

As children get older, the government's role in their lives increases, most conspicuously through public education. More than 90 percent of the nation's children are enrolled in public schools. Although Uncle Sam is directly responsible for only 6 percent of public school funding, the Republican budget would deprive the states of

more than \$33 billion in education funds over seven years, according to the National Education Association. Moreover, the flow of federal money into states for a host of other purposes frees state and local resources for education. Some southern states depend on federal aid for as much as 40 percent of their revenue. As federal money drops, these states will be hard-pressed even to maintain spending on schools, much less to increase it.

Government programs also bolster economic prospects for young adults, who will feel the pinch of Republican cuts. The most obvious example here is college loans. Tuition, up 92 percent in the last ten years for private four-year colleges, now prices many middle-class families out of the market. Yet the Republicans cut billions out of the college loan program (not to mention additional millions from grants for poor kids) both by increasing costs to student borrowers and slashing Clinton's direct-lending program (a reform measure that would have saved \$6 billion even by some conservative estimates).

Nor does the conservative caricature reckon with the laws and regulations affecting the workplace that positively benefit families. By enacting parental and family leave policies—and, indirectly, by enacting labor laws that allow unions to fight for good working conditions—government provides some modest protection to the average working parent. To be sure, the U.S. government could be doing more in this regard, as European nations do. But here is another case where young people clearly benefit from government intervention, and could benefit a lot more.

Of course, the deficit reduction pitch is most directly aimed at young adults like the Coalition's Heather. And, in fact, young adults are in worse economic straits than at any time since the Great Depression. Falling wages, a tighter labor market, and rising college costs have made it harder for young people to maintain their parents' standard of living, much less get ahead. A national survey by scholars at the Cooperative Institutional Research Program in 1991 found that the median parental income of incoming college freshmen had increased more than twice as fast as the median income of all families with children—yet one more sign that America's class structure is becoming more rigid.

Well-publicized economic anxiety in the under-30 crowd gives credibility to the deficit hawks' evocation of the lost American Dream. But let's take a closer look at Heather. She is supposed to be a typi-

cal twentysomething, right down to her untucked flannel shirt. Yet to pay \$800 in taxes just to cover the interest on the debt, as she claims, Heather probably makes somewhere in the neighborhood of \$28,000 a year, according to Robert McIntyre, director of Citizens for Tax Justice. That may not sound like much money, but Heather is quite well-off for her age. Census figures show that median income for 25- to 29-year-olds is a mere \$17,000 (and just \$14,400 for 25- to 29-year-old women), and their share of the debt burden is accordingly smaller. Maybe Heather lies awake nights counting deficit dollars, but most of her generation worry less about the IRS than about health insurance or just making a living wage.

Generational arguments misrepresent the economic interests of the young.



Here is the real debate that the “mortgaging-the-future” rhetoric glosses over. Why are many young people facing such dismal prospects? The presumption in the Heather campaign is that the culprit, pure and simple, is deficit and debt. Rapid debt deflation, however, will likely shrink economic growth and mean fewer jobs for young people. Much of what government spends on the young, moreover, can fairly be scored as an investment in the future. Spending less on education and training will reduce their future opportunities.

The generational argument is a distraction from another real issue. Suppose for a moment the logic of budget cutting, down to zero deficit, is compelling. Then who should pay for it? In the conservative caricature, it comes down to the old versus the young. But does the 25-year-old waitress really have more in common with the 25-year-old college graduate who has a cushy advertising job than with the 50-year-old laborer with no health insurance? The key divide is not generational—it’s economic. If we have to cut, we could, of course, cut tax breaks that disproportionately benefit the rich, not the EITC.

And it’s hard to reconcile the conservatives’ professed concern for children with their protection of

such corporate welfare programs as weapons purchases even the Pentagon doesn’t want. It’s hard to blame Grandma for bankrupting the public till when, as Karen Paget wrote in these

pages (see “Can’t Touch This,” *TAP*, Fall 1995), respected defense experts from both the left and right think it is possible to cut as much as \$200 billion from the Defense budget over seven years. That money alone would eliminate the need for the cuts in Medicaid and school lunches. Corporate welfare accounts for \$25 billion a year in subsidies and \$20 billion more in tax

breaks, according to the Progressive Policy Institute. Even if some of that “welfare” arguably represents legitimate government investments, there’s enough fat in there to make up for the EITC reduction.

What’s more, if the Republicans were really worried about the economic prospects for young Americans, what about raising the minimum wage? More than 25 percent of all Americans who make the minimum wage are under the age of 20. A hike in the minimum wage would provide an immediate boost to struggling twentysomethings, and according to recent research by Princeton economists Alan Krueger and David Card, there would be no significant adverse effect on jobs.

There’s a reality gap here. The Republican interest in the young stops where their other economic interests begin—which may help explain why the generation gap hasn’t been a hit at the grass roots. But where complicated budget issues are concerned, the pretense of popular support is less a reflection of grassroots activism and more the result of conventional wisdom, as certified by reputed experts and the media. Every time a congressman reiterates the generational argument, every time a newsmagazine prints it, every time a television actress shouts it, it gains new intellectual currency, diverting attention away from more fundamental questions that might spotlight real issues of inequality and slow down the momentum of the conservative assault on the public sector. □

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF CIVIC AMERICA

BY ROBERT D. PUTNAM

For the last year or so, I have been wrestling with a difficult mystery. It is a classic brainteaser, with a corpus delicti, a crime scene strewn with clues, and many potential suspects. As in all good detective stories, however, some plausible miscreants turn out to have impeccable alibis, and some important clues hint at portentous developments that occurred before the curtain rose.

The mystery concerns the strange disappearance of social capital and civic engagement in America. By “social capital,” I mean features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. (Whether or not their shared goals are praiseworthy is, of course, entirely another matter.) I use the term “civic engagement” to refer to people’s connections with the life of their communities, not only with politics.

Although I am not yet sure that I have solved the mystery, I have assembled evidence that clarifies what happened. An important clue, as we shall see, involves differences among generations. Americans who came of age during the Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their communities than the generations that have followed them. The passing of this “long civic generation” appears to be an important proximate cause of the decline of our civic life. This discovery does not in itself crack the case, but when combined with other data it points strongly to one suspect against whom I shall presently bring an indictment.

Evidence for the decline of social capital and civic engagement comes from a number of independent sources. Surveys of average Americans in 1965, 1975, and 1985, in which they recorded every single activity during a day—so-called “time-budget” stud-

A more extended version of this article, complete with references, appears in the Winter 1995 issue of PS, a publication of the American Political Science Association. This work, originally delivered as the inaugural Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecture, builds on Putnam’s earlier articles, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” Journal of Democracy (January 1995) and “The Prosperous Community,” TAP (Spring 1993).

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ies—indicate that since 1965 time spent on informal socializing and visiting is down (perhaps by one-quarter) and time devoted to clubs and organizations is down even more sharply (by roughly half). Membership records of such diverse organizations as the PTA, the Elks club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues show that participation in many conventional voluntary associations has declined by roughly 25 percent to 50 percent over the last two to three decades. Surveys show sharp declines in many measures of collective political participation, including attending a rally or speech (off 36 percent between 1973 and 1993), attending a meeting on town or school affairs (off 39 percent), or working for a political party (off 56 percent).

Some of the most reliable evidence about trends comes from the General Social Survey (GSS), conducted nearly every year for more than two decades. The GSS demonstrates, at all levels of education and among both men and women, a drop of roughly one-quarter in group membership since 1974 and a drop of roughly one-third in social trust since 1972. (Trust in political authorities, indeed in many social institutions, has also declined sharply over the last three decades, but that is conceptually a distinct trend.) Slumping membership has afflicted all sorts of groups, from sports clubs and professional associations to literary discussion groups and labor unions. Only nationality groups, hobby and garden clubs, and the catch-all category of “other” seem to have resisted the ebbing tide. Gallup polls report that church attendance fell by roughly 15 percent during the 1960s and has remained at that lower level ever since, while data from the National Opinion Research Center suggest that the decline continued during the 1970s and 1980s and by now amounts to roughly 30 percent. A more complete audit of American social capital would need to account for apparent countertrends. Some observers believe, for example, that support groups and neighborhood watch groups are proliferating, and few deny that the last several decades have witnessed explosive growth in interest groups represented in Washington. The growth of such “mailing list” organizations as the American Association of Retired People and the Sierra Club, although highly significant in political (and commercial) terms, is not really a counterexample to the supposed decline in social connectedness, however, since these are not really associations in which members meet one another. Their members’ ties are to common symbols and ideologies, but not to each other. Similarly, although most secondary associations are not-for-profit, most prominent nonprofits (from Harvard University to the Ford Foundation to the Metropolitan Opera) are bureaucracies, not secondary associations, so the growth of the “third sector” is not tantamount to a growth in social connectedness. With due regard to various kinds of counterevidence,

Those born between 1910 and 1940 are substantially more engaged in community affairs than people born later.

I believe that the weight of available evidence confirms that Americans today are significantly less engaged with their communities than was true a generation ago.

Of course, American civil society is not moribund. Many good people across the land work hard every day to keep their communities vital. Indeed, evidence suggests that America still outranks many other countries in the degree of our community involvement and social trust. But if we examine our lives, not our aspirations, and if we compare ourselves not with other countries but with our parents, the best available evidence suggests that we are less connected with one another.

Reversing this trend depends, at least in part, on understanding the causes of the strange malady afflicting American civic life. This is the mystery I seek to unravel here: Why, beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1970s and 1980s, did the fabric of American community life begin to fray? Why are more Americans bowling alone?

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Many possible answers have been suggested for this puzzle:

- busy-ness and time pressure;
- economic hard times (or, according to alternative theories, material affluence);
- residential mobility;
- suburbanization;
- the movement of women into the paid labor force and the stresses of two-career families;
- disruption of marriage and family ties;
- changes in the structure of the American economy, such as the rise of chain stores, branch firms, and the service sector;
- the sixties (most of which actually happened in the seventies); including
 - Vietnam, Watergate, and disillusion with public life; and
 - the cultural revolt against authority (sex, drugs, and so on);
- growth of the welfare state;
- the civil rights revolution;
- television, the electronic revolution, and other technological changes.

The classic questions posed by a detective are means, motive, and opportunity. A solution, even a

partial one, to our mystery must pass analogous tests.

Is the proposed explanatory factor correlated with trust and civic engagement? If not, that factor probably does not belong in the lineup. For example, if working women turn out to be more engaged in community life than housewives, it would be harder to attribute the downturn in community organizations to the rise of two-career families.

Is the correlation spurious? If parents, for example, were more likely than childless people to be joiners, that might be an important clue. However, if the correlation between parental status and civic engagement turned out to be entirely spurious, due to the effects of (say) age, we would have to remove the declining birth rate from our list of suspects.

Is the proposed explanatory factor changing in the relevant way? Suppose, for instance, that people who often move have shallower community roots. That could be an important part of the answer to our mystery *only if* residential mobility itself had risen during this period.

Is the proposed explanatory factor vulnerable to the claim that it might be the result of civic disengagement, not the cause? For example, even if newspaper readership were closely correlated with civic engagement across individuals and across time, we would need to weigh the degree to which reduced newspaper circulation is the result (not the cause) of disengagement.

Against those benchmarks, let us weigh the evidence. But first we must acknowledge a trend that only complicates our task.

EDUCATION DEEPENS THE MYSTERY

Education is by far the strongest correlate that I have discovered of civic engagement in all its forms, including social trust and membership in many different types of groups. In fact, the effects of education become greater and greater as we move up the educational ladder. The four years of education between 14 and 18 total years have *ten times more impact* on trust and membership than the first four years of formal education. This curvilinear pattern applies to both men and women, and to all races and generations.

Sorting out just why education has such a massive effect on social connectedness would require a book in itself. Education is in part a proxy for social class and economic differences, but when income, social status, and education are used together

er to predict trust and group membership, education continues to be the primary influence. So, well-educated people are much more likely to be joiners and trusters, partly because they are better off economically, but mostly because of the skills, resources, and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and in school.

The expansion of high schools and colleges earlier this century has had an enormous impact on the educational composition of the adult population during just the last two decades. Since 1972 the proportion of adults with fewer than 12 years of education has been cut in half, falling from 40 percent to 18 percent, while the proportion with more than 12 years has nearly doubled, rising from 28 percent to 50 percent, as the generation of Americans educated around the turn of this century (most of whom did not finish high school) died off and were replaced by the baby boomers and their successors (most of whom attended college).

So here we have two facts—education boosts civic engagement sharply, and educational levels have risen massively—that only deepen our central mystery. By itself, the rise in educational levels should have increased social capital during the last 20 years by 15-20 percent, even assuming that the effects of education were merely linear. (Taking account of the curvilinear effect in the figure, “Education and Civic Life,” the rise in trusting and joining should have been even greater, as Americans moved up the accelerating curve.) By contrast, however, the actual GSS figures show a net decline since the early 1970s of roughly the same magnitude (trust by about 20-25 percent, memberships by about 15-20 percent). The relative declines in social capital are similar within each educational category—roughly 25 percent in group memberships and

roughly 30 percent in social trust since the early 1970s, and probably even more since the early 1960s.

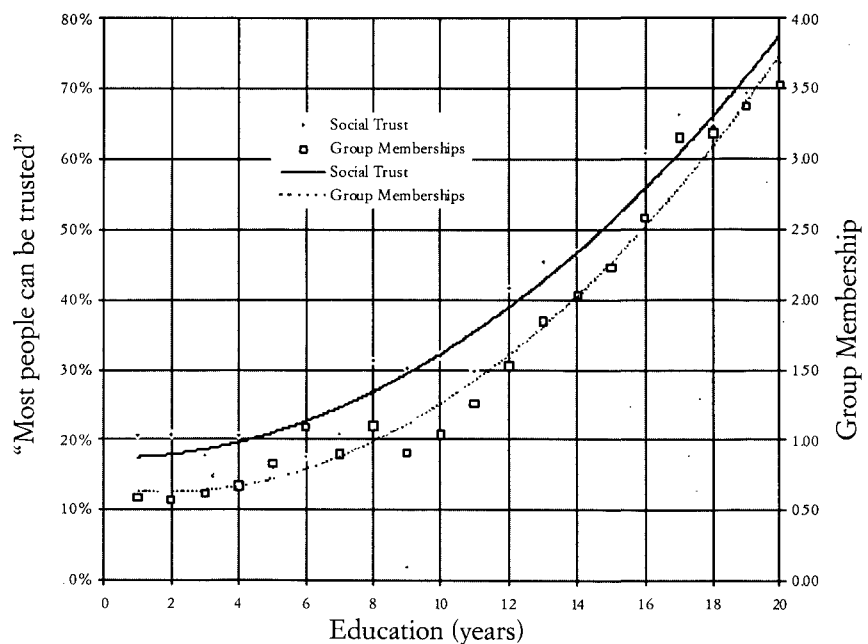
While this first investigative foray leaves us more mystified than before, we may nevertheless draw two useful conclusions. First, we need to take account of educational differences in our exploration of other factors to be sure that we do not confuse their effects with the consequences of education. And, second, the mysterious disengagement of the last quarter century seems to have afflicted all educational strata in our society, whether they have had graduate education or did not finish high school.

MOBILITY AND SUBURBANIZATION

Many studies have found that residential stability and such related phenomena as homeownership are associated with greater civic engagement. At an earlier stage in this investigation I observed that “mobility, like frequent re-potting of plants, tends to disrupt root systems, and it takes time for an uprooted individual to put down new roots.” I must now report, however, that further inquiry

EDUCATION AND CIVIC LIFE

Social trust and group membership by years of education



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994

fully exonerates residential mobility from any responsibility for our fading civic engagement.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995 (and earlier years) show that rates of residential mobility have been remarkably constant over the last half century. In fact, to the extent that there has been any change at all, both long-distance and short-distance mobility have declined over the last five decades. During the 1950s, 20 percent of Americans changed residence each year and 6.9 percent annually moved across county borders; during the 1990s, the comparable figures are 17 percent and 6.6 percent. Americans, in short, are today slightly more rooted residentially than a generation ago. The verdict on mobility is unequivocal: This theory is simply wrong.

But if moving itself has not eroded our social capital, what about the possibility that we have moved to places, especially suburbs, that are less congenial to social connectedness? In fact, social connectedness does differ by community type, but the differences turn out to be modest and in directions that are inconsistent with the theory.

Controlling for such characteristics as education, age, income, work status, and race, citizens of the nation's 12 largest metropolitan areas (particularly their central cities, but also their suburbs) are roughly 10 percent less trusting and report 10-20 percent fewer group memberships than residents of other cities and towns (and their suburbs). Meanwhile, residents of very small towns and rural areas are (in accord with some hoary stereotypes) slightly more trusting and civically engaged than other Americans. Unsurprisingly, the prominence of different types of groups does vary significantly by location: Major cities have more political and nationality clubs; smaller cities more fraternal, service, hobby, veterans', and church groups; and rural areas more agricultural organizations. But overall rates of associational membership are not very different.

Moreover, this pattern cannot account for our central puzzle. In the first place, there is virtually no correlation between gains in population and losses in social capital, either across states or across localities of different sizes. Even taking into account the educational and social backgrounds of those who have moved there, the suburbs have faintly higher levels of trust and civic engagement than their respective central cities, which should have produced growth, not decay, in social capital over the

last generation. The central point, however, is that the downtrends in trusting and joining are virtually identical everywhere—in cities, big and small, in suburbs, in small towns, and in the countryside.

Of course, Evanston is not Levittown is not Sun City. The evidence available does not allow us to determine whether different types of suburban living have different effects on civic connections and social trust. However, these data do rule out the thesis that suburbanization per se has caused the erosion of America's social capital. Both where we live and how long we've lived there matter for social capital, but neither explains why it is eroding everywhere.

PRESSURES OF TIME AND MONEY

Americans certainly *feel* busier now than a generation ago: The proportion of us who report feeling "always rushed" jumped by half between the mid-1960s and the mid-1990s. Probably the most obvious suspect behind our tendency to drop out of community affairs is pervasive busy-ness. And lurking nearby in the shadows are economic pressures so much discussed nowadays, from job insecurity to declining real wages.

Yet, however culpable busy-ness and economic insecurity may appear at first glance, it is hard to find incriminating evidence. In the first place, time-budget studies do not confirm the thesis that Americans are, on average, working longer than a generation ago. On the contrary, a new study by John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey of the University of Maryland reports a five hour per week *gain* in free time for the average American between 1965 and 1985, due partly to reduced time spent on housework and partly to earlier retirement. Their claim that Americans have more leisure time now than several decades ago is, to be sure, contested by other observers, notably Juliet Schor, who in her 1991 book *The Overworked American* reports evidence that work hours are lengthening, especially for women.

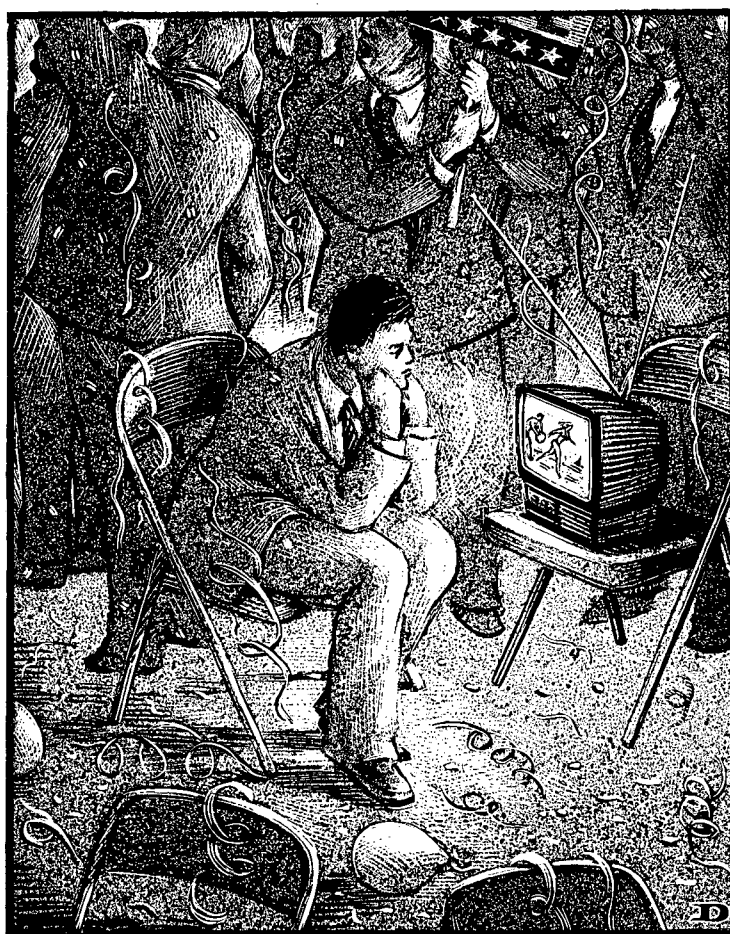
But whatever the resolution of that controversy, other data call into question whether longer hours at work lead to lessened involvement in civic life or reduced social trust. Results from the GSS show that employed people belong to somewhat more groups than those outside the paid labor force. Even more striking is the fact that among workers, longer hours are linked to more civic engagement. The patterns among men and women on this score

are not identical: Women who work part-time appear to be somewhat more civically engaged and socially trusting than either those who work full-time or those who do not work outside the home at all—an intriguing anomaly, though not relevant to our basic puzzle, since female part-time workers constitute a relatively small fraction of the American population, and the fraction is growing, up from about 8 percent to about 10 percent between the early 1970s and early 1990s.

But what do workaholics do less? Robinson reports that, unsurprisingly, people who spend more time at work do feel more rushed, and these harried souls do spend less time eating, sleeping, reading books, engaging in hobbies, and just doing nothing. Compared to the rest of the population, they also spend a lot less time watching television, almost 30 percent less. However, they do not spend less time on organizational activity. In short, those who work longer forego *Nightline*, but not the Kiwanis club; *ER*, but not the Red Cross.

So hard work does not *prevent* civic engagement. Moreover, the nationwide falloff in joining and trusting is perfectly mirrored among full-time workers, among part-time workers, and among those outside the paid labor force. So if people are dropping out of community life, long hours do not seem to be the reason.

If time pressure is not the culprit, how about financial pressures? It is true that people with lower incomes and those who feel financially strapped are somewhat less engaged in community life and somewhat less trusting than those who are better off, even holding education constant. On the other hand, the downtrends in social trust and civic engagement are visible among people of all incomes, with no sign whatever that they are concentrated among those who have borne the brunt of the economic distress of the last two decades. Quite the contrary, the declines in engagement and trust are actually somewhat greater among the more affluent segments of the American public than among the poor and middle-income wage-earners. Moreover, personal financial satisfaction is wholly uncorrelated with civic engagement and



social trust. In short, neither objective nor subjective economic well-being has inoculated Americans against the virus of civic disengagement; if anything, affluence has slightly exacerbated the problem. Poverty and economic inequality are dreadful, growing problems for America, but they are not the villains of *this* piece.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

Most of our mothers were housewives, and most of them invested heavily in social capital formation—a jargony way of referring to untold unpaid hours in church suppers, PTA meetings, neighborhood coffee klatches, and visits to friends and relatives. The movement of women out of the home and into the paid labor force is probably the most portentous social change of the last half century. However welcome and overdue the feminist revolution may be, it is hard to believe that it has had no impact on social connectedness. Could this be the primary reason for the decline of social capital over the last generation?

Some patterns in the survey evidence seem to support this claim. All things considered, women belong to somewhat fewer voluntary associations than men do. On the other hand, time-budget studies suggest that women spend more time on those groups and more time in informal social connecting than men. Although the absolute declines in joining and trusting are approximately equivalent among men and women, the relative declines are somewhat greater among women. Controlling for education, memberships among men have declined at a rate of about 10-15 percent a decade, compared to about 20-25 percent a decade for women. The time-budget data, too, strongly suggest that the decline in organizational involvement in recent years is concentrated among women. These sorts of facts, coupled with the obvious transformation in the professional role of women over this same period, led me in previous work to suppose that the emergence of two-career families might be the most important single factor in the erosion of social capital.

As we saw earlier, however, work status itself seems to have little net impact on group membership or on trust. Housewives belong to different types of groups than do working women (more PTAs, for example, and fewer professional associations), but in the aggregate working women are actually members of slightly more voluntary associations (though housewives, according to Robinson and Godbey, spend more time on them). Moreover, the overall declines in civic engagement are somewhat greater among housewives than among employed women. Comparison of time-budget data between 1965 and 1985 seems to show that employed women as a group are actually spending more time on organizations than before, while housewives are spending less. This same study suggests that the major decline in informal socializing since 1965 has also been concentrated among housewives. The central fact, of course, is that the overall trends are down for all categories of women (and for men, too, even bachelors), but the figures suggest that women who work full-time actually may have been more resistant to the slump than those who do not.

Thus, although women appear to have borne a disproportionate share of the decline in civic engagement over the last two decades, it is not easy to find any micro-level data that tie that fact directly to their entry into the labor force. Of course,

women who have chosen to enter the workforce doubtless differ in many respects from women who have chosen to stay home. Perhaps one reason that community involvement appears to be rising among working women and declining among housewives is that precisely the sort of women who, in an earlier era, were most involved with their communities have been disproportionately likely to enter the workforce, thus lowering the average level of civic engagement among the remaining homemakers and raising the average among women in the workplace.

No doubt the movement of women into the workplace over the last generation has changed the *types of organizations* to which they belong. Contrary to my own earlier speculations, however, I can find little evidence to support the hypothesis that this movement has played a major role in the net reduction of social connectedness and civic engagement. On the other hand, I have no clear alternative explanation for the fact that the relative declines are greater among women, both those who work outside the home and those who don't, than among men. Since this evidence is at best circumstantial, perhaps the best interim judgment here is the famous Scots verdict: not proven.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Another widely discussed social trend that more or less coincides with the downturn in civic engagement is the breakdown of the traditional family unit—mom, dad, and the kids. Since the family itself is, by some accounts, a key form of social capital, perhaps its eclipse is part of the explanation for the reduction in joining and trusting in the wider community. What does the evidence show?

First of all, evidence of the loosening of family bonds is unequivocal. In addition to the century-long increase in divorce rates (which accelerated from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and then leveled off), and the more recent increase in single-parent families, the incidence of one-person households has more than doubled since 1950, in part because of the rising number of widows living alone. The net effect of all these changes, as reflected in the General Social Survey, is that the proportion of all American adults currently unmarried climbed from 28 percent in 1974 to 48 percent in 1994.

Second, married men and women do rank somewhat higher on both our measures of social capital.

That is, controlling for education, age, race, and so on, single people—both men and women, divorced, separated, and never married—are significantly less trusting and less engaged civically than married people. (Multivariate analysis hints that one major reason why divorce lowers connectedness is that it lowers family income, which in turn reduces civic engagement.) Roughly speaking, married men and women are about a third more trusting and belong to about 15-25 percent more groups than comparable single men and women. (Widows and widowers are more like married people than single people in this comparison.)

In short, successful marriage, especially if the family includes children, is statistically associated with greater social trust and civic engagement. Thus, some part of the decline in both trust and membership is tied to the decline in marriage. To be sure, the direction of causality behind this correlation may be complicated, since it is conceivable that loners and paranoids are harder to live with. If so, divorce may in some degree be the consequence, not the cause, of lower social capital. Probably the most reasonable summary of these arrays of data, however, is that the decline in successful marriage is a significant, though modest part of the reason for declining trust and lower group membership. On the other hand, changes in family structure cannot be a major part of our story, since the overall declines in joining and trusting are substantial even among the happily married. My own verdict (based in part on additional evidence to be introduced later) is that the disintegration of marriage is probably an accessory to the crime, but not the major villain of the piece.

THE RISE OF THE WELFARE STATE

Circumstantial evidence, particularly the timing of the downturn in social connectedness, has suggested to some observers that an important cause—perhaps even *the* cause—is big government and the growth of the welfare state. By “crowding out” private initiative, it is argued, state intervention has subverted civil society.

Some government policies have almost certainly had the effect of destroying social capital. For example, the so-called “slum clearance” policies of the

1950s and 1960s replaced physical capital, but destroyed social capital, by disrupting existing community ties. It is also conceivable that certain social expenditures and tax policies may have created dis-

incentives for civic-minded philanthropy. On the other hand, it is much harder to see which government policies might be responsible for the decline in bowling leagues and literary clubs. Some community institutions sponsored, organized, or subsidized by government, such as National Service, agricultural extension programs, and Head Start, may enhance trust and social capital. Which effect prevails needs to be resolved with evidence, not ideology.

One empirical approach to this issue is to examine differences in civic engagement and public policy across different political jurisdictions to see whether

enlarged government leads to shriveled social capital. Among the U.S. states, however, differences in social capital appear essentially uncorrelated with various measures of welfare spending or government size. Citizens in free-spending states are no less trusting or engaged than citizens in frugal ones.

Cross-national comparison can also shed light on this question. Among nineteen member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for which data on social trust and group membership are available from the 1990-1991 World Values Survey, these indicators of social capital are, if anything, positively correlated with the size of the state. This simple bivariate analysis, of course, cannot tell us whether social connectedness encourages welfare spending, whether the welfare state fosters civic engagement, or whether both are the result of some other unmeasured factor(s). Even this simple finding, however, is not easily reconciled with the notion that big government undermines social capital.

RACE AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION

Some observers have noted that the decline in social connectedness began just after the successes of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. That coincidence has suggested the possibility of a kind of sociological “white flight,” as legal desegregation of civic life led whites to withdraw from community associations.

The decline of marriage is probably an accessory to the crime, not the main villain.

The erosion of social capital, however, has affected all races. In fact, during the 1980s the downturns in both joining and trusting were even greater among African Americans (and other racial minorities) than among the white majority. This fact is inconsistent with the thesis that "white flight" is a significant cause of civic disengagement, since black Americans have been dropping out of religious and civic organizations at least as rapidly as white Americans. Even more important, the pace of disengagement among whites has been uncorrelated with racial intolerance or support for segregation. Avowedly racist or segregationist whites have been no quicker to drop out of community organizations during this period than more tolerant whites.

This evidence is far from conclusive, of course, but it does shift the burden of proof onto those who believe that racism is a primary explanation for growing civic disengagement over the last quarter century. This evidence also suggests that reversing the civil rights gains of the last thirty years would do nothing to reverse the social capital losses.

GENERATIONAL EFFECTS

Our efforts thus far to identify the major sources of civic disengagement have been singularly unfruitful. In all our statistical analyses, however, one factor, second only to education, stands out as a predictor of all forms of civic engagement and trust. That factor is age. Older people belong to more organizations than young people, and they are less misanthropic. Older Americans also vote more often and read newspapers more frequently, two other forms of civic engagement closely correlated with joining and trusting.

"Civic Engagement by Age" shows the basic pattern. Civic involvement appears to rise more or less steadily from early adulthood toward a plateau in middle age, from which it declines only late in life. This humpback pattern seems naturally to represent the arc of life's engagements. That, at least, was how I first interpreted the data. But that would be a fundamental misreading of the most important clue in our whole whodunit.

Evidence from the General Social Survey enables us to follow individual cohorts as they age. If the rising lines in the figure indeed represent deepening civic engagement with age, we should be able to track this same deepening engagement as we follow, for example, the first of the baby

boomers, born in 1947, as they aged from 25 in 1972 (the first year of the GSS) to 47 in 1994 (the latest year available). Startlingly, however, such an analysis, repeated for successive birth cohorts, produces virtually no evidence of such life cycle changes in civic engagement. In fact, as various generations moved through the period between 1972 and 1994, their levels of trust and membership more often fell than rose, reflecting a more or less simultaneous decline in civic engagement among young and old alike, particularly during the second half of the 1980s. But that downtrend obviously cannot explain why, throughout the period, older Americans were always more trusting and engaged. In fact, the only reliable life cycle effect visible in these data is a withdrawal from civic engagement very late in life, as we move through our eighties.

The central paradox posed by these patterns is this: Older people are consistently more engaged and trusting than younger people, yet we do not become more engaged and trusting as we age. What's going on here?

Time and age are notoriously ambiguous in their effects on social behavior. Social scientists have learned to distinguish three contrasting phenomena:

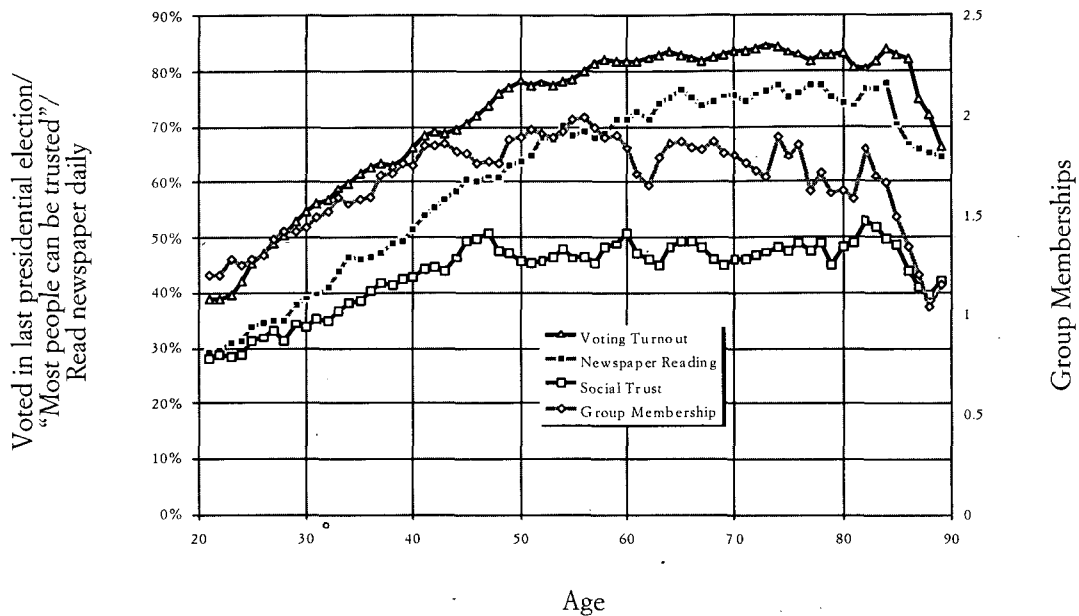
Life cycle effects represent differences attributable to stage of life. In this case individuals change as they age, but since the effects of aging are, in the aggregate, neatly balanced by the "demographic metabolism" of births and deaths, life cycle effects produce no aggregate change. Everyone's close-focus eyesight worsens as we age, but the aggregate demand for reading glasses changes little.

Period effects affect all people who live through a given era, regardless of their age. Period effects can produce both individual and aggregate change, often quickly and enduringly, without any age-related differences. The sharp drop in trust in government between 1965 and 1975, for example, was almost entirely this sort of period effect, as Americans of all ages changed their minds about their leaders' trustworthiness. Similarly, as just noted, a modest portion of the decline in social capital during the 1980s appears to be a period effect.

Generational effects affect all people born at the same time. Like life cycle effects (and unlike typical period effects), generational effects show up as disparities among age groups at a single point in time, but like period effects (and unlike life cycle

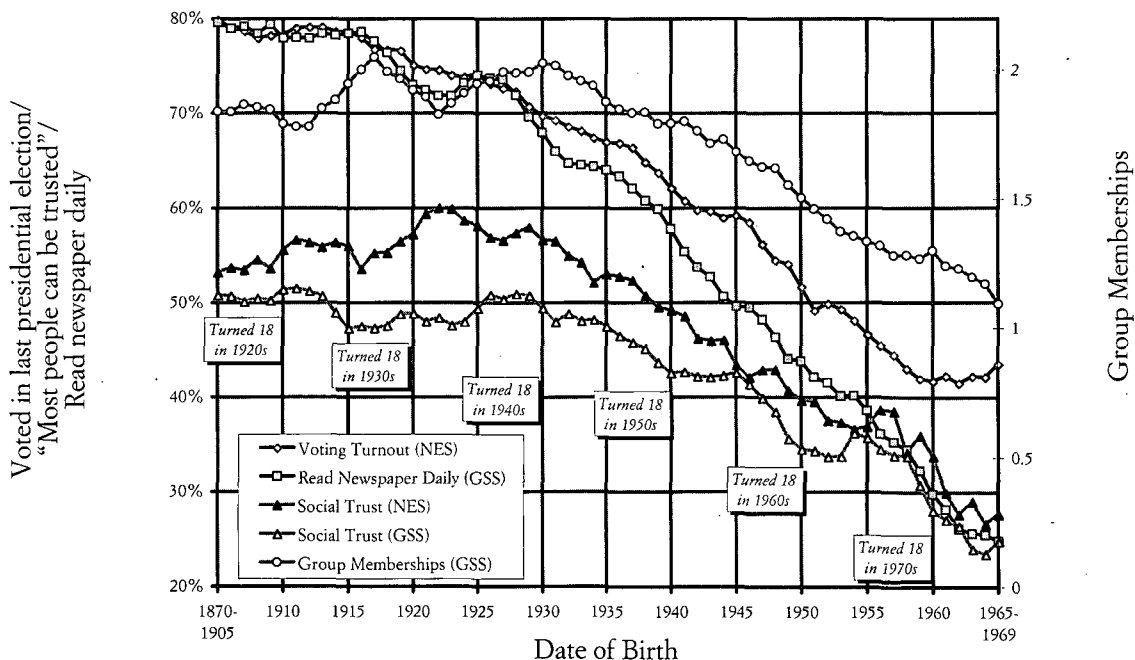
TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CIVIC GENERATION GAP

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY AGE (EDUCATION CONTROLLED)



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994. Respondents aged 21-89. Three-year moving averages. Equal weighting of three educational categories.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BY GENERATION (EDUCATION CONTROLLED)



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-1994, and National Election Studies, 1952-1992. Respondents aged 25-80. Five-year moving averages. Equal weighting of three educational categories.

effects) generational effects produce real social change, as successive generations, enduringly “imprinted” with divergent outlooks, enter and leave the population. In pure generational effects, no individual ever changes, but society does.

Returning to our conundrum, how could older people today be more engaged and trusting, if they did not become more engaged and trusting as they aged? The key to this paradox, as David Butler and Donald Stokes observed in another context, is to ask, not *how old people are*, but *when they were young*. The figure on page 43, “Social Capital and Civic Engagement by Generation,” addresses this reformulated question, displaying various measures of civic engagement according to the respondents’ year of birth.

THE LONG CIVIC GENERATION

In effect, the figure on the bottom of page 43 lines up Americans from left to right according to their date of birth, beginning with those born in the last third of the nineteenth century and continuing across to the generation of their great-grandchildren, born in the last third of the twentieth century. As we begin moving along this queue from left to right—from those raised around the turn of the century to those raised during the Roaring Twenties, and so on—we find relatively high and unevenly rising levels of civic engagement and social trust. Then rather abruptly, however, we encounter signs of reduced community involvement, starting with men and women born in the early 1930s. Remarkably, this downward trend in joining, trusting, voting, and newspaper reading continues almost uninterrupted for nearly 40 years. The trajectories for the various different indicators of civic engagement are strikingly parallel: Each shows a high, sometimes rising plateau for people born and raised during the first third of the century; each shows a turning point in the cohorts around 1930; and each then shows a more or less constant decline down to the cohorts born during the 1960s.

By any standard, these intergenerational differences are extraordinary. Compare, for example, the generation born in the early 1920s with the generation of their grandchildren born in the late 1960s. Controlling for educational disparities, members of the generation born in the 1920s belong to almost twice as many civic associations as those born in the late 1960s (roughly 1.9 memberships per capi-

ta, compared to roughly 1.1 memberships per capita). The grandparents are more than twice as likely to trust other people (50-60 percent compared with 25 percent for the grandchildren). They vote at nearly double the rate of the most recent cohorts (roughly 75 percent compared with 40-45 percent), and they read newspapers almost three times as often (70-80 percent read a paper daily compared with 25-30 percent). And bear in mind that we have found no evidence that the youngest generation will come to match their grandparents’ higher levels of civic engagement as they grow older.

Thus, read not as life cycle effects, but rather as generational effects, the age-related patterns in our data suggest a radically different interpretation of our basic puzzle. Deciphered with this key, the figure on page 43 depicts a long “civic” generation, born roughly between 1910 and 1940, a broad group of people substantially more engaged in community affairs and substantially more trusting than those younger than they. (Members of the 1910-1940 generation also seem more civic than their elders, at least to judge by the outlooks of relatively few men and women born in the late nineteenth century who appeared in our samples.) The culminating point of this civic generation is the cohort born in 1925-1930, who attended grade school during the Great Depression, spent World War II in high school (or on the battlefield), first voted in 1948 or 1952, set up housekeeping in the 1950s, and watched their first television when they were in their late twenties. Since national surveying began, this cohort has been exceptionally civic: voting more, joining more, reading newspapers more, trusting more. As the distinguished sociologist Charles Tilly (born in 1928) said in commenting on an early version of this essay, “We are the last suckers.”

To help in interpreting the historical contexts within which these successive generations of Americans matured, the figure also indicates the decade within which each cohort came of age. Thus, we can see that each generation that reached adulthood since the 1940s has been less engaged in community affairs than its immediate predecessor.

Further confirmation of this generational interpretation comes from a comparison of the two parallel lines that chart responses to an identical question about social trust, posed first in the National Election Studies (mainly between 1964 and 1976) and then in the General Social Survey

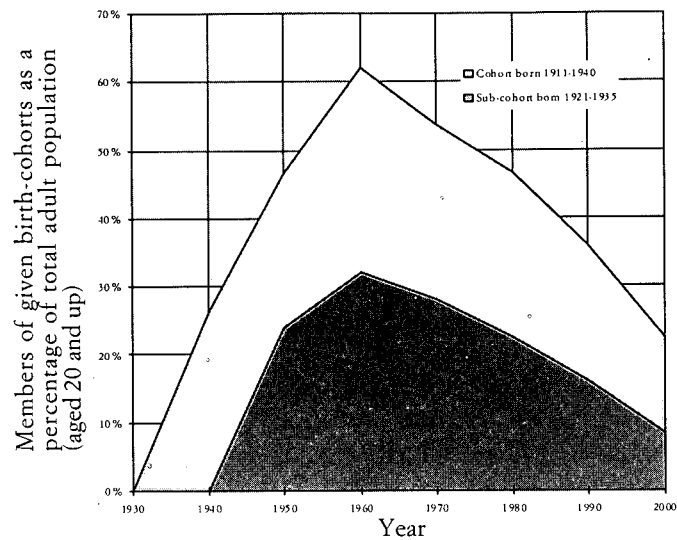
between 1972 and 1994. If the greater trust expressed by Americans born earlier in the century represented a life cycle effect, then the graph from the GSS surveys (conducted when these cohorts were, on average, 10 years older) should have been some distance above the NES line. In fact, the GSS line lies about 5-10 percent below the NES line. That downward shift almost surely represents a period effect that depressed social trust among all cohorts during the 1980s. That downward period effect, however, is substantially more modest than the large generational differences already noted.

In short, the most parsimonious interpretation of the age-related differences in civic engagement is that they represent a powerful reduction in civic engagement among Americans who came of age in the decades after World War II, as well as some modest additional disengagement that affected all cohorts during the 1980s. These patterns hint that being raised after World War II was a quite different experience from being raised before that watershed. It is as though the postwar generations were exposed to some mysterious X-ray that permanently and increasingly rendered them less likely to connect with the community. Whatever that force might have been, it—rather than anything that happened during the 1970s and 1980s—accounts for most of the civic disengagement that lies at the core of our mystery.

But if this reinterpretation of our puzzle is correct, why did it take so long for the effects of that mysterious X-ray to become manifest? If the underlying causes of civic disengagement can be traced to the 1940s and 1950s, why did the effects become conspicuous in PTA meetings and Masonic lodges, in the volunteer lists of the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts, and in polling stations and church pews and bowling alleys across the land only during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s?

The visible effects of this generational disengagement were delayed by two important factors. First, the postwar boom in college enrollments raised levels of civic engagement, offsetting the generational trends. As Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks observe in their as yet unpublished book, *The American Voter Reconsidered*, the postwar expansion of educational opportunities “fore-

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF A CIVIC GENERATION



Source: Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports.

stalled a cataclysmic drop” in voting turnout, and it had a similar delaying effect on civic disengagement more generally.

Second, the full effects of generational developments generally appear several decades after their onset, because it takes that long for a given generation to become numerically dominant in the adult population. Only after the mid-1960s did significant numbers of the “post-civic generation” reach adulthood, supplanting older, more civic cohorts. The figure above (“The Rise and Decline of a Civic Generation”) illustrates this generational accounting. The long civic generation born between 1910 and 1940 reached its zenith in 1960, when it comprised 62 percent of those who chose between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. By the time that Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, that cohort’s share in the electorate had been cut precisely in half. Conversely, over the last two decades (from 1974 to 1994) boomers and X-ers (that is, Americans born after 1946) have grown as a fraction of the adult population from 24 percent to 60 percent.

In short, the very decades that have seen a national deterioration in social capital are the same decades during which the numerical dominance of a trusting and civic generation has been replaced by the dominion of “post-civic” cohorts. Moreover, although the long civic generation has enjoyed unprecedented life expectancy, allowing its mem-

bers to contribute more than their share to American social capital in recent decades, they are now passing from the scene. Even the youngest members of that generation will reach retirement age within the next few years. Thus, a generational analysis leads almost inevitably to the conclusion that the national slump in trust and engagement is likely to continue, regardless of whether the more modest "period effect" depression of the 1980s continues.

OUR PRIME SUSPECT

To say that civic disengagement in contemporary America is in large measure generational merely reformulates our central puzzle. We now know that much of the cause of our lonely bowling probably dates to the 1940s and 1950s, rather than to the 1960s and 1970s. What could have been the mysterious anticivic "X-ray" that affected Americans who came of age after World War II and whose effects progressively deepened at least into the 1970s?

Our new formulation of the puzzle opens the possibility that the zeitgeist of national unity, patriotism, and shared sacrifice that culminated in 1945 might have reinforced civic-mindedness. On the other hand, it is hard to assign any consistent role to the Cold War and the Bomb, since the anticivic trend appears to have deepened steadily from the 1940s to the 1970s, in no obvious harmony with the rhythms of world affairs. Nor is it easy to construct an interpretation of the data on generational differences in which the cultural vicissitudes of the sixties could play a significant role. Neither can economic adversity or affluence easily be tied to the generational decline in civic engagement, since the slump seems to have affected in equal measure those who came of age in the placid fifties, the booming sixties, and the busted seventies.

I have discovered only one prominent suspect against whom circumstantial evidence can be mounted, and in this case, it turns out, some directly incriminating evidence has also turned up. This is not the occasion to lay out the full case for the prosecution, nor to review rebuttal evidence for the defense, but I want to present evidence that justifies indictment.

The culprit is television.

First, the timing fits. The long civic generation was the last cohort of Americans to grow up without television, for television flashed into American society like lightning in the 1950s. In 1950 barely

10 percent of American homes had television sets, but by 1959, 90 percent did, probably the fastest diffusion of a major technological innovation ever recorded. The reverberations from this lightning bolt continued for decades, as viewing hours grew by 17-20 percent during the 1960s and by an additional 7-8 percent during the 1970s. In the early years, TV watching was concentrated among the less educated sectors of the population, but during the 1970s the viewing time of the more educated sectors of the population began to converge upward. Television viewing increases with age, particularly upon retirement, but each generation since the introduction of television has begun its life cycle at a higher starting point. By 1995 viewing per TV household was more than 50 percent higher than it had been in the 1950s.

Most studies estimate that the average American now watches roughly four hours per day (excluding periods in which television is merely playing in the background). Even a more conservative estimate of three hours means that television absorbs 40 percent of the average American's free time, an increase of about one-third since 1965. Moreover, multiple sets have proliferated: By the late 1980s three-quarters of all U.S. homes had more than one set, and these numbers too are rising steadily, allowing ever more private viewing. Robinson and Godbey are surely right to conclude that "television is the 800-pound gorilla of leisure time." This massive change in the way Americans spend their days and nights occurred precisely during the years of generational civic disengagement.

Evidence of a link between the arrival of television and the erosion of social connections is, however, not merely circumstantial. The links between civic engagement and television viewing can be instructively compared with the links between civic engagement and newspaper reading. The basic contrast is straightforward: Newspaper reading is associated with high social capital; TV viewing with low social capital.

Controlling for education, income, age, race, place of residence, work status, and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership, whereas the same correlations with newspaper reading are positive. Within every educational category, heavy readers are avid joiners, whereas heavy viewers are more likely to be loners. In fact, more detailed analysis suggests that heavy TV watching is one important

reason *why* less educated people are less engaged in the life of their communities. Controlling for differential TV exposure significantly reduces the correlation between education and engagement.

Viewing and reading are themselves uncorrelated—some people do lots of both, some do little of either—but “pure readers” (that is, people who watch less TV than average and read more newspapers than average) belong to 76 percent more civic organizations than “pure viewers” (controlling for education, as always). Precisely the same pattern applies to other indicators of civic engagement, including social trust and voting turnout. “Pure readers,” for example, are 55 percent more trusting than “pure viewers.”

In other words, each hour spent viewing television is associated with less social trust and less group membership, while each hour reading a newspaper is associated with more. An increase in television viewing of the magnitude that the U.S. has experienced in the last four decades might directly account for as much as one-quarter to one-half of the total drop in social capital, even without taking into account, for example, the indirect effects of television viewing on newspaper reader-

ship or the cumulative effects of lifetime viewing hours. Newspaper circulation (per household) has dropped by more than half since its peak in 1947. To be sure, it is not clear which way the tie between newspaper reading and civic involvement works, since disengagement might itself dampen one’s interest in community news. But the two trends are clearly linked.

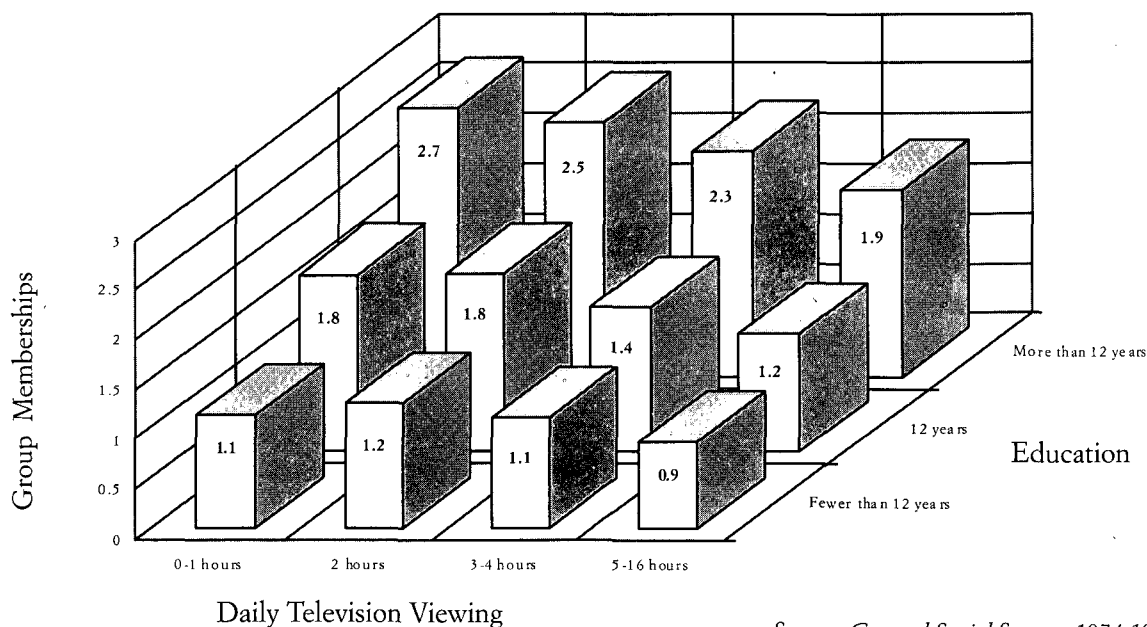
HOW MIGHT TV DESTROY SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Time displacement. Even though there are only 24 hours in everyone’s day, most forms of social and media participation are positively correlated. People who listen to lots of classical music are more likely, not less likely, than others to attend Cubs games. Television is the principal exception to this generalization—the only leisure activity that seems to inhibit participation outside the home. TV watching comes at the expense of nearly every social activity outside the home, especially social gatherings and informal conversations. TV viewers are homebodies.

Most studies that report a negative correlation between television watching and community

THE TV CONNECTION

Group membership by television viewing and education



Source: General Social Survey, 1974-1994

involvement (see "The TV Connection," previous page) are ambiguous with respect to causality, because they merely compare different individuals at a single time. However, one important quasi-experimental study of the introduction of television in three Canadian towns found the same pattern at the aggregate level across time. A major effect of television's arrival was the reduction in participation in social, recreational, and community activities among people of all ages. In short, television privatizes our leisure time.

Effects on the outlooks of viewers. An impressive body of literature suggests that heavy watchers of TV are unusually skeptical about the benevolence of other people—overestimating crime rates, for example. This body of literature has generated much debate about the underlying causal patterns, with skeptics suggesting that misanthropy may foster couch-potato behavior rather than the reverse. While awaiting better experimental evidence, however, a reasonable interim judgment is that heavy television watching may well increase pessimism about human nature. Perhaps too, as social critics have long argued, both the medium and the message have more basic effects on our ways of interacting with the world and with one another. Television may induce passivity, as Neil Postman has claimed.

Effects on children. TV consumes an extraordinary part of children's lives, about 40 hours per week on average. Viewing is especially high among pre-adolescents, but it remains high among younger adolescents: Time-budget studies suggest that among youngsters aged 9 to 14 television consumes as much time as all other discretionary activities combined, including playing, hobbies, clubs, outdoor activities, informal visiting, and just hanging out. The effects of television on childhood socialization have, of course, been hotly debated for more than three decades. The most reasonable conclusion from a welter of sometimes conflicting results appears to be that heavy television watching probably increases aggressiveness (although perhaps not actual violence), that it probably reduces school achievement, and that it is statistically associated with "psychosocial malfunctioning," although how much of this effect is self-selection and how much causal remains much debated. The evidence is, as I have said, not yet enough to convict, but the defense has a lot of explaining to do.

More than two decades ago, just as the first signs of disengagement were beginning to appear in American politics, the political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool observed that the central issue would be—it was then too soon to judge, as he rightly noted—whether the development represented a temporary change in the weather or a more enduring change in the climate. It now appears that much of the change whose initial signs he spotted did in fact reflect a climatic shift.

Moreover, just as the erosion of the ozone layer was detected only many years after the proliferation of the chlorofluorocarbons that caused it, so too the erosion of America's social capital became visible only several decades after the underlying process had begun. Like Minerva's owl that flies at dusk, we come to appreciate how important the long civic generation has been to American community life just as its members are retiring. Unless America experiences a dramatic upward boost in civic engagement (a favorable "period effect") in the next few years, Americans in 2010 will join, trust, and vote even less than we do today.

In an astonishingly prescient book, *Technologies without Borders*, published in 1991 after his death, Pool concluded that the electronic revolution in communications technology was the first major technological advance in centuries that would have a profoundly decentralizing and fragmenting effect on society and culture. He hoped that the result might be "community without contiguity." As a classic liberal, he welcomed the benefits of technological change for individual freedom, and in part, I share that enthusiasm. Those of us who bemoan the decline of community in contemporary America need to be sensitive to the liberating gains achieved during the same decades. We need to avoid an uncritical nostalgia for the fifties. On the other hand, some of the same freedom-friendly technologies whose rise Pool predicted may indeed be undermining our connections with one another and with our communities. Pool defended what he called "soft technological determinism" because he recognized that social values can condition the effects of technology. This perspective invites us not merely to consider how technology is privatizing our lives—if, as it seems to me, it is—but to ask whether we like the result, and if not, what we might do about it. Those are questions we should, of course, be asking together, not alone. □

Creating Public Value

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MARK H. MOORE

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VIRTUALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

BY SHERRY TURKLE

SEARCHING FOR COMMUNITY IN CYBERSPACE

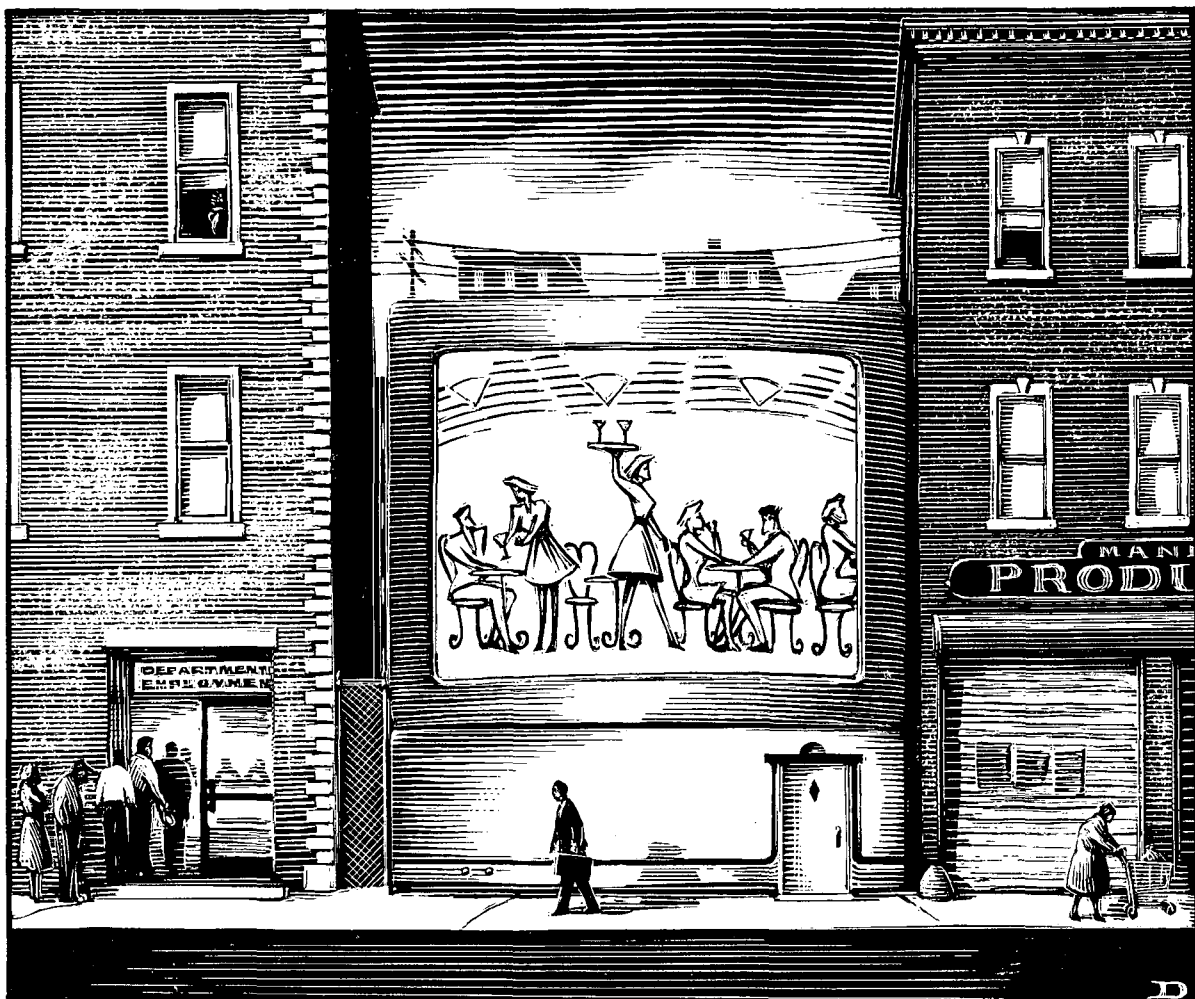
The anthropologist Ray Oldenberg has written about the “great good place”—the local bar, the bistro, the coffee shop—where members of a community can gather for easy company, conversation, and a sense of belonging. Oldenberg considers these places to be the heart of individual social integration and community vitality. Today we see a resurgence of coffee bars and bistros, but most of them do not serve, much less recreate, coherent communities and, as a result, the odor of nostalgia often seems as strong as the espresso.

Some people are trying to fill the gap with neighborhoods in cyberspace. Take Dred’s Bar, for example, a watering hole on the MUD LambdaMOO. MUDs, which originally stood for “multi-user dungeons,” are destinations on the Internet where players who have logged in from computers around the world join an on-line virtual community. Through typed commands, they can converse privately or in large groups, creating and playing characters and even earning and spending imaginary funds in the MUD’s virtual economy.

In many MUDs, players help build the virtual world itself. Using a relatively simple programming language, they can make “rooms” in the MUD, where they can set the stage and define the rules. Dred’s Bar is one such place. It is described as having a “castle decor” and a polished oak dance floor. Recently I (here represented by my character or persona “ST”) visited Dred’s Bar with Tony, a persona I had met on another MUD. After passing the bouncer, Tony and I encountered a man asking for a \$5 cover charge, and once we paid it our hands were stamped.

Adapted from Life on the Screen by Sherry Turkle. ©1995 by Sherry Turkle. Reprinted by permission of Simon and Schuster, Inc.

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The crowd opens up momentarily to reveal one corner of the club. A couple is there, making out madly. Friendly place . . .

You sit down at the table. The waitress sees you and indicates that she will be there in a minute.

[The waitress here is a bot-short for robot-that is, a computer program that presents itself as a personality.]

The waitress comes up to the table, "Can I get anyone anything from the bar?" she says as she puts down a few cocktail napkins.

Tony says, "When the waitress comes up, type order name of drink."

Abigail [a character at the bar]

dries off a spot where some drink spilled on her dress.

The waitress nods to Tony and writes on her notepad.

[I type "order margarita," following Tony's directions.]

You order a margarita.

The waitress nods to ST and writes on her notepad.

Tony sprinkles some salt on the back of his hand.

Tony remembers he ordered a margarita, not tequila, and brushes the salt off.

You say, "I like salt on my margarita too."

The DJ makes a smooth transition from The Cure into a song by 10,000

Maniacs.

The drinks arrive. You say,

"L'chaim."

Tony says, "Excuse me?"

After some explanations, Tony says, "Ah, . . ." smiles, and introduces me to several of his friends. Tony and I take briefly to the dance floor to try out some MUD features that allow us to waltz and tango, then we go to a private booth to continue our conversation.

MAIN STREET, MALL, AND VIRTUAL CAFÉ

What changes when we move from Oldenberg's great good places to something like Dred's Bar on LambdaMOO? To answer this question, it helps to consider an intermediate step—moving from a sidewalk café to a food court in a suburban shopping mall. Shopping malls try to recreate the Main Streets of yesteryear, but critical elements change in the process. Main Street, though commercial, is also a public place; the shopping mall is entirely planned to maximize purchasing. On Main Street you are a citizen; in the shopping mall, you are customer as citizen. Main Street had a certain disarray: the town drunk, the traveling snake-oil salesman. The mall is a more controlled space; there may be street theater, but it is planned—the appearance of serendipity is part of the simulation. If Dred's Bar seems plausible, it is because the mall and so much else in our culture, especially television, have made simulations so real.

On any given evening, nearly eighty million people in the United States are watching television. The average American household has a television turned on more than six hours a day, reducing eye contact and conversation. Computers and the virtual worlds they provide are adding another dimension of mediated experience. Perhaps computers feel so natural because of their similarity to watching TV, our dominant social experience for the past forty years.

The bar featured for a decade in the television series *Cheers* no doubt figures so prominently in the American imagination at least partly because most of us don't have a neighborhood place where "everybody knows your name." Instead, we identify with the place on the screen. Bars designed to look like the one on *Cheers* have sprung up all over the country, most poignantly in airports, our most anonymous

of locales. Here, no one will know your name, but you can always buy a drink or a souvenir sweatshirt.

In the postwar atomization of American social life, the rise of middle-class suburbs created communities of neighbors who often remained strangers. Meanwhile, as the industrial and economic base of urban life declined, downtown social spaces such as the neighborhood theater or diner were replaced by malls and cinema complexes in the outlying suburbs. In the recent past, we left our communities to commute to these distant entertainments; increasingly, we want entertainment that commutes right into our homes. In both cases, the neighborhood is bypassed. We seem to be in the process of retreating further into our homes, shopping for merchandise in catalogues or on television channels or for companionship in personals ads.

Technological optimists think that computers will reverse some of this social atomization; they tout virtual experience and virtual community as ways for people to widen their horizons. But is it really sensible to suggest that the way to revitalize community is to sit alone in our rooms, typing at our networked computers and filling our lives with virtual friends?

THE LOSS OF THE REAL

Which would you rather see—a Disney crocodile robot or a real crocodile? The Disney version rolls its eyes, moves from side to side, and disappears beneath the surface and rises again. It is designed to command our attention at all times. None of these qualities is necessarily visible at a zoo where real crocodiles seem to spend most of their time sleeping. And you may have neither the means nor the inclination to observe a real crocodile in the Nile or the River Gambia.

Compare a rafting trip down the Colorado River to an adolescent girl's use of an interactive CD-ROM to explore the same territory. A real rafting trip raises the prospect of physical danger. One may need to strain one's resources to survive, and there may be a rite of passage. This is unlikely to be the experience of an adolescent girl who picks up an interactive CD-ROM called "Adventures on the Colorado." A touch-sensitive screen allows her to explore the virtual Colorado and its shoreline. Clicking a mouse brings up pictures and descriptions of local flora and fauna. She can have all the maps and literary references she wants. All this might be fun, perhaps useful. But in its uniformity

and lack of risk, it is hard to imagine its marking a transition to adulthood.

But why not have both—the virtual Colorado and the real one? Not every exploration need be a rite of passage. The virtual and the real may provide different things. Why make them compete? The difficulty is that virtuality tends to skew our experience of the real in several ways. First, it makes denatured and artificial experiences seem real—let's call it the Disneyland effect. After a brunch on Disneyland's Royal Street, a cappuccino at a restaurant chain called Bonjour Café at an Anaheim shopping mall may seem real by comparison. After playing a video game in which your opponent is a computer program, the social world of MUDs may seem real as well. At least real people play most of the parts and the play space is relatively open. One player compares the roles he was able to play on video games and on MUDs. "Nintendo has a good [game] where you can play four characters. But even though they are very cool," he says, "they are written up for you." They seem artificial. In contrast, on the MUDs, he says, "There is nothing written up." He says he feels free. MUDs are "for real" because you make them up yourself.

Another effect of simulation, which might be thought of as the artificial crocodile effect, is that the fake seems more compelling than the real. In *The Future Does Not Compute: Warnings from the Internet*, Stephen L. Talbott quotes educators who say that years of exciting nature programming have compromised wildlife experiences for children. The animals in the woods are unlikely to perform as dramatically as those captured on the camera. I have a clear memory of a Brownie Scout field trip to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens where I asked an attendant if she could make the flowers open fast. For a long while, no one understood what I was talking about. Then they figured it out: I was hoping that the attendant could make the flowers behave as they did in the time-lapse photography I had seen in Disney films.

Third, virtual experience may be so compelling that we believe that within it we've achieved more than we have. Many of the people I have interviewed claim that virtual gender-swapping (pretending to be the opposite sex on the Internet) enables them to understand what it's like to be a person of the other gender, and I have no doubt that this is true, at least in part. But as I have listened to this boast, my mind has often travelled to my

own experiences of living in a woman's body. These include worry about physical vulnerability, fears of unwanted pregnancy and infertility, fine-tuned decisions about how much make-up to wear to a job interview, and the difficulty of giving a professional seminar while doubled over with monthly cramps. Some knowledge is inherently experiential, dependent on physical sensations.

Pavel Curtis, the founder of LambdaMOO, begins his paper on its social dimensions with a quote from E. M. Forster: "The Machine did not transmit nuances of expression. It only gave a general idea of people—an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes." But what are practical purposes? And what about impractical purposes? To the question, "Why must virtuality and real life compete—why can't we have both?" the answer is of course that we will have both. The more important question is "How can we get the best of both?"

THE POLITICS OF VIRTUALITY

When I began exploring the world of MUDs in 1992, the Internet was open to a limited group, chiefly academics and researchers in affiliated commercial enterprises. The MUDders were mostly middle-class college students. They chiefly spoke of using MUDs as places to play and escape, though some used MUDs to address personal difficulties. By late 1993, network access could easily be purchased commercially, and the number and diversity of people on the Internet had expanded dramatically. Conversations with MUDders began to touch on new themes. To some young people, "RL" (real life) was a place of economic insecurity where they had trouble finding meaningful work and holding on to middle-class status. Socially speaking, there was nowhere to go but down in RL, whereas MUDs offered a kind of virtual social mobility.

Josh is a 23-year-old college graduate who lives in a small studio apartment in Chicago. After six months of looking for a job in marketing, the field in which he recently received his college degree, Josh has had to settle for a job working on the computer system that maintains inventory records at a large discount store. He considers this a dead end. When a friend told him about MUDs, he gave them a try and within a week stepped into a new life.

Now, eight months later, Josh spends as much time on MUDs as he can. He belongs to a class of players who sometimes call themselves Internet Hobos. They solicit time on computer accounts the

way panhandlers go after spare change. In contrast to his life in RL, Josh's life inside MUDs seems rich and filled with promise. It has friends, safety, and space. "I live in a terrible part of town. I see a rat hole of an apartment, I see a dead-end job, I see AIDS. Down here [in the MUD] I see friends, I have something to offer, I see safe sex." His programming on MUDs is far more intellectually challenging than his day job. Josh has worked on three MUDs, building large, elaborate living quarters in each, and has become a specialist at building virtual cafés in which "bots" serve as waiters and bartenders. Within MUDs, Josh serves as a programming consultant to many less experienced players and has even become something of an entrepreneur. He "rents" ready-built rooms to people who are not as skilled in programming as he is. He has been granted wizard privileges on various MUDs in exchange for building food service software. He dreams that such virtual commerce will someday lead to more—that someday, if MUDs become commercial enterprises, he could build them for a living. MUDs offer Josh a sense of participating in the American Dream.

MUDs play a similar role for Thomas, 24, whom I met after giving a public lecture in Washington, D.C. After graduating from college, Thomas entered a training program at a large department store. When he discovered that he didn't like retailing, he quit the program, thinking that he would look for better opportunities. But things did not go well for him; he couldn't find a job that would give him the middle-class life he knew as a child. Finally, he took a job as a bellhop in the hotel where I had just spoken. "MUDs got me back into the middle class," Thomas tells me. He has a group of MUD friends who write well, program, and read science fiction. "I'm interested in MUD politics. Can there be democracy in cyberspace? Should MUDs be ruled by wizards or should they be democracies? I majored in political science in college. These are important questions for the future. I talk about these things with my friends. On MUDs."

Thomas moves on to what has become an obvious conclusion. He says, "MUDs make me more what I really am. Off the MUD, I am not as much me." Tanya, also 24, a college graduate working as a nanny in rural Connecticut, expresses similar aspirations. She says of the MUD on which she has built Japanese-style rooms and a bot to offer her guests a kimono, slippers, and tea, "I feel like I

have more stuff on the MUD than I have off it."

Josh, Thomas, and Tanya belong to a generation whose college years were marked by economic recession and a deadly sexually transmitted disease. They scramble for work; finances force them to live in neighborhoods they don't consider safe; they may end up back home living with parents. These young people are looking for a way back into the middle class. MUDs provide them with the sense of a middle-class peer group. So it is really not that surprising that it is in this virtual social life that they feel most like themselves.

Is the real self always the naturally occurring one? If a patient on the antidepressant medication Prozac tells his therapist he feels more like himself with the drug than without it, what does this do to our standard notions of a real self? Where does a medication end and a person begin? Where does real life end and a game begin? Is the real self always the one in the physical world? As more and more real business gets done in cyberspace, could the real self be the one who functions in that realm? Is the real Tanya the frustrated nanny or the energetic programmer on the MUD? The stories of these MUDders point to a whole set of issues about the political and social dimension of virtual community. These young people feel they have no political voice, and they look to cyberspace to help them find one.

SEX AND VIOLENCE IN CYBERSPACE

If real business increasingly gets done in cyberspace, what kinds of rules will govern it? And how will those rules be made, democratically or by fiat? The issue arises starkly in connection with sex and violence.

Consider the first moments of a consensual sexual encounter between the characters Backslash and Targa. The player behind Backslash, Ronald, a mathematics graduate student in Memphis, types "emote fondles Targa's breast" and "say You are beautiful Targa" and Elizabeth, Targa's player, sees on her screen:

Backslash fondles Targa's breast.
Backslash says, "You are beautiful
Targa."

Elizabeth responds with "say Touch me again, and harder. Please. Now. That's how I like it." Ronald's screen shows:

Targa says, "Touch me again, and harder." Please. Now. That's how I like it."

But consensual relationships are only one facet of virtual sex. Virtual rape can occur within a MUD if one player finds a way to control the actions of another player's character and can thus "force" that character to have sex. The coercion depends on being able to direct the actions and reactions of characters independent of the desire of their players. So if Ronald were such a culprit, he would be the only one typing, having gained control of Targa's character. In this case 15-year-old Elizabeth, who plays Targa, would sit at her computer, shocked to

'Down here
[in the MUD] I
see friends, I
have something
to offer, I see
safe sex.'

find herself or rather her "self" begging Backslash for more urgent caresses and ultimately violent intercourse.

Some might say that such incidents hardly deserve our concern, as they involve "only words," nothing more. But can a community that exists entirely in the

realm of communication ignore sexual aggression that takes the form of words?

In March 1992, a character calling himself Mr. Bungle, "an oleaginous, Bisquick-faced clown dressed in cum-stained harlequin garb and girdled with a mistletoe-and-hemlock belt whose buckle bore the inscription 'KISS ME UNDER THIS, BITCH!'" appeared in the LambdaMOO living room. Creating a phantom that masquerades as another player's character is a MUD programming trick often referred to as creating a voodoo doll. The "doll" is said to possess the character, so that the character must do whatever the doll does. Bungle used such a voodoo doll to force one and then another of the room's occupants to perform sexual acts on him. Bungle's first victim was legba, a character described as "a Haitian trickster spirit of indeterminate gender, brown-skinned and wearing an expensive pearl gray suit, top hat, and dark glasses." Even when ejected from the room, Bungle was able to continue his sexual assaults. He forced various players to have sex with each other and then

forced legba to swallow his (or her?) own pubic hair and made a character called Starsinger attack herself sexually with a knife. Finally, Bungle was immobilized by a MOO wizard who "toaded" the perpetrator (erased the character from the system).

The next day, legba took the matter up on a widely read mailing list within LambdaMOO called *social-issues. Legba called both for "civility" and "virtual castration." A journalist chronicling this event, Julian Dibbell, contrasts the cyberspace description of the event with what was going on in real life. The woman who played the character of legba told Dibbell that she cried as she wrote those words, but he points out that her mingling of "murderous rage and eyeball-rolling annoyance was a curious amalgam." According to the conventions of virtual reality, legba and Starsinger were brutally raped, but here was the victim legba scolding Mr. Bungle only for a breach of "civility." According to the conventions of real life, the incident was confined to the realm of the symbolic—no one suffered any physical harm—but here was the player legba calling for Mr. Bungle's dismemberment. Dibbell writes: "Ludicrously excessive by RL's lights, woefully understated by VR's, the tone of legba's response made sense only in the buzzing, dissonant gap between them."

Virtual rape—of which the incident on LambdaMOO was only one example—raises the question of accountability for the actions of virtual personae who have only words at their command. Similar issues of accountability arise in the case of virtual murder. If your MUD character erases the computer database on which I have over many months built up a richly described character and goes on to announce to the community that my character is deceased, what exactly have you, the you that exists in real life, done? What if my virtual apartment is destroyed along with all its furniture, VCR, kitchen equipment, and stereo system? What if you kidnap my virtual dog—my beloved bot Rover, which I have trained to perform tricks on demand? What if you destroy him and leave his dismembered body in the MUD?

The problem of civil order has come up sharply in the history of a MUD called Habitat, initially built to run on Commodore 64 personal computers in the early 1980s. It had a short run in the United States before it was bought and transferred to Japan. Its

designers, Chip Morningstar and F. Randall Farmer, have written about how its players struggled to establish the rights and responsibilities of virtual selves. On Habitat, players were originally allowed to have guns and other weapons. Morningstar and Farmer say that they "included these because we felt that players should be able to 'materially' affect each other in ways that went beyond simply talking, ways that required real moral choices to be made by the participants." Death in Habitat, however, had little in common with the RL variety. "When an Avatar is killed, he or she is teleported back home, head in hands (literally), pockets empty, and any object in hand at the time dropped on the ground at the scene of the crime." This was more like a setback in a game of Chutes and Ladders than real mortality, and for some players thievery and murder became the highlights of the game. For others, these activities were a violent intrusion on their peaceful world. An intense debate ensued.

Some players argued that guns should be eliminated, for in a virtual world a few lines of code can translate into an absolute gun ban. Others argued that what was dangerous in virtual reality was not violence but its trivialization. These individuals maintained that guns should be allowed, but their consequences should be made more serious; when you are killed, your character should cease to exist and not simply be sent home. Still others believed that since Habitat was just a game and playing assassin was part of the fun, there could be no harm in a little virtual violence.

As the debate continued, a player who was a Greek Orthodox priest in real life founded the first Habitat church, the "Order of the Holy Walnut," whose members pledged not to carry guns, steal, or engage in virtual violence of any kind. In the end, the game's designers divided the world into two parts. In town, violence was prohibited; in the wilds outside town, it was allowed. Eventually a democratic voting process was installed and a sheriff elected. Participants then took up discussion on the nature of Habitat laws and the proper balance between law and order and individual freedom. It was a remarkable situation. Participants in Habitat were seeing themselves as citizens; they were spending their leisure time debating pacifism, the nature of good government, and the relationship between representations and reality. In the nineteenth century, utopians built communities in

which political thought could be lived out in practice. On the cusp of the twenty-first century, we are creating utopian communities in cyberspace.

Some participants have devoted much energy to the political life of MUDs. LambdaMOO, like Habitat, has undergone a major change in its form of governance. Instead of the MUD wizards (or system administrators) making policy decisions, there is a complex system of grassroots petitions and collective voting. Thomas, the bellhop I met in Washington, goes on at length about the political factions with which he must contend to "do politics" on LambdaMOO. Our conversation is taking place in fall 1994. His home state has an upcoming race for the U.S. Senate, hotly contested, ideologically charged, but he hasn't registered to vote and doesn't plan to. I bring up the Senate race. He shrugs it off: "I'm not voting. Doesn't make a difference. Politicians are liars."

RESISTANCE OR ESCAPE?

In *Reading the Romance*, the literary scholar Janice Radaway argues that when women read romance novels they are not escaping but building realities less limited than their own. Romance reading becomes a form of resistance, a challenge to the stultifying categories of everyday life. If we take Radaway's perspective, we can look at MUDs and other kinds of virtual communities as places of resistance to the many forms of alienation and to the silences they impose.

But what resistance do virtual communities really offer? Two decades ago, computer hobbyists saw personal computers as a path to a new populism. They imagined how networks would allow citizens to band together to run decentralized schools and governments. Personal computers would create a more participatory political system, the hobbyists believed, because "people will get used to understanding things, to being in control of things, and they will demand more." The hobbyists I interviewed then were excited, enthusiastic, and satisfied with what they were doing with their machines. But I worried about the limits of this enthusiasm, and in my earlier book about personal computers, *The Second Self*, I wrote: "People will not change unresponsive political systems or intellectually deadening work environments by building machines that are responsive, fun, and intellectually challenging."

My misgivings today are similar. Instead of solving real problems—both personal and social—many

of us appear to be choosing to invest ourselves in unreal places. Women and men tell me that the rooms and mazes on MUDs are safer than city streets, virtual sex is safer than sex anywhere, MUD friendships are more intense than real ones, and when things don't work out you can always leave.

To be sure, MUDs afford an outlet for some people to work through personal issues in a productive way; virtual environments provide a moratorium from RL that can be turned to constructive purpose, and not only for adolescents. One can also respect the sense in which political activities in a MUD demonstrate resistance to what is unsatisfying about political life more generally. And yet, it is sobering that the personal computer revolution, once conceptualized as a tool to rebuild community, now tends to concentrate on building community inside a machine.

If the politics of virtuality means democracy online and apathy off-line, there is reason for concern. There is also reason for concern when access to the new technology breaks down along traditional class lines. Although some inner-city communities have used computer-mediated communication as a tool for real community building, the overall trend seems to be the creation of an information elite.

Virtual environments are valuable as places where we can acknowledge our inner diversity. But we still want an authentic experience of self. One's fear is, of course, that in the culture of simulation, a word like authenticity can no longer apply. So even as we try to make the most of virtual environments, a haunting question remains. For me, that question is raised every time I use the MUD command for taking an action. The command is "emote." If I type "emote waves" while at Dred's café on LambdaMOO, the screens of all players in the MUD room will flash "ST waves." If I type "emote feels a complicated mixture of desire and expectation," all screens will flash "ST feels a complicated mixture of desire and expectation." But what exactly do I feel? Or, what exactly do I feel? When we get our MUD persona to "emote" something and observe the effect, do we gain a better understanding of our real emotions, which can't be switched on and off so easily, and which we may not even be able to describe? Or is the emote command and all that it stands for a reflection of what Fredric Jameson has called the flattening of affect in postmodern life?

The overheated language that surrounds current

discussion of computer-mediated communications falls within a long tradition of American technological optimism. The optimists today tend to represent urban decay and class polarization as out-of-date formulations of a problem that could be solved with the right technology—for example, technology that could enable every schoolchild to experience "being digital." Are our streets dangerous? Not to worry: The community will be "wired" so children can attend school without having to walk there! This way of thinking about cyberspace substitutes life on the screen for life in our bodies and physical communities.

But there is another way of thinking, one that stresses making the virtual and the real more permeable to each other. We don't have to reject life on the screen, but we don't have to treat it as an alternative life either. Virtual personae can be a resource for self-reflection and self-transformation. Having literally written our on-line worlds into existence, we can use the communities we build inside our machines to improve the ones outside of them. Like the anthropologist returning home from a foreign culture, the voyager in virtuality can return to the real world better able to understand what about it is arbitrary and can be changed. □

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The Clinton Presidency: First Appraisals

Colin Campbell, *Georgetown University* and Bert A. Rockman, *University of Pittsburgh*, eds.

The budget deficit that played havoc with Bush's campaign promise of no new taxes would limit even more a president disposed to policy entrepreneurship and activist government. Clinton, the policy wonk, entered that candy store just as its shelves had been emptied.

Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman

In the wake of the 1994 elections, conditions are right for copartisan politics in which the president and Republican leaders offer counterproposals, potentially resulting in cross-partisan bargaining. This pattern of presidential-congressional interaction need not produce gridlock. In fact, recent history suggests that it can be a productive mode of national policymaking.

Charles O. Jones

The lessons the 103rd Congress and the 1994 elections teach politicians are likely to have serious effects long after the 104th Congress is history. Negativism and blatant obstructionism pay off in electoral success; taking on big problems seriously and making tough choices do not.

Barbara Sinclair

Clinton's administration is a reflection of Clinton. His failure to communicate a clear and convincing political vision remains at the root of the problems of staffing, turnover in personnel, giving direction to the Justice Department's legal policies, and reversal of positions on important issues.

David M. O'Brien

In Clinton's appointments strategy, policy goals were not the key, the mosaic was the key. But one lesson of this administration is that a government that "looks like America" is far from enough for political success.

Joel D. Aberbach

The ability of an incumbent to run a negative campaign is limited—a positive message seems essential. Clinton, like Bush in 1992, may find "my opponents could be worse" to be an uninspiring, unavailing campaign theme.

Harold W. Stanley

As a result of either open-minded flexibility in his thinking or a chronic desire to please in his personality, President Clinton presented an attractive target for lobbyists. If the president disagreed with an interest group at the outset, it was entirely possible he would agree with them by the end.

Graham K. Wilson

There seems to be an almost visceral level of dislike for Clinton, a rejection of him not as a leader or politician but as a person. Much of the aversion to Bill Clinton appears to be based on cultural issues such as gays in the military, abortion, and doubts about the president's character. These controversies set the tone for the administration, and the issue of character is never far from the headlines.

George C. Edwards III

In his first two years in office, President Clinton's response to the challenges of domestic policy leadership was notable, above all, for its inconsistency. With respect to policy change, Clinton won some battles, lost others, and ended up with a substantial record of achievement. Politically, however, he lost the war.

Paul J. Quirk and Joseph Hinchliffe

In the wake of the midterm elections, Clinton's prospects for influence over policy appear greater in the Middle East than in the Congress of the United States. Dealing with Prime Minister Rabin of Israel or President Assad of Syria might prove less difficult than working with Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole on the Republican Contract with America.

Larry Berman and Emily O. Goldman

The challenge the Republicans have launched against the preexisting order of things rests on their conviction that there is no legitimate reason for the existence of a domestically powerful or competent federal government. Many not sharing that ideology would come to the opposite conclusion. The present political struggle thus amounts to a colossal clinical experiment to decide this issue.

Walter Dean Burnham

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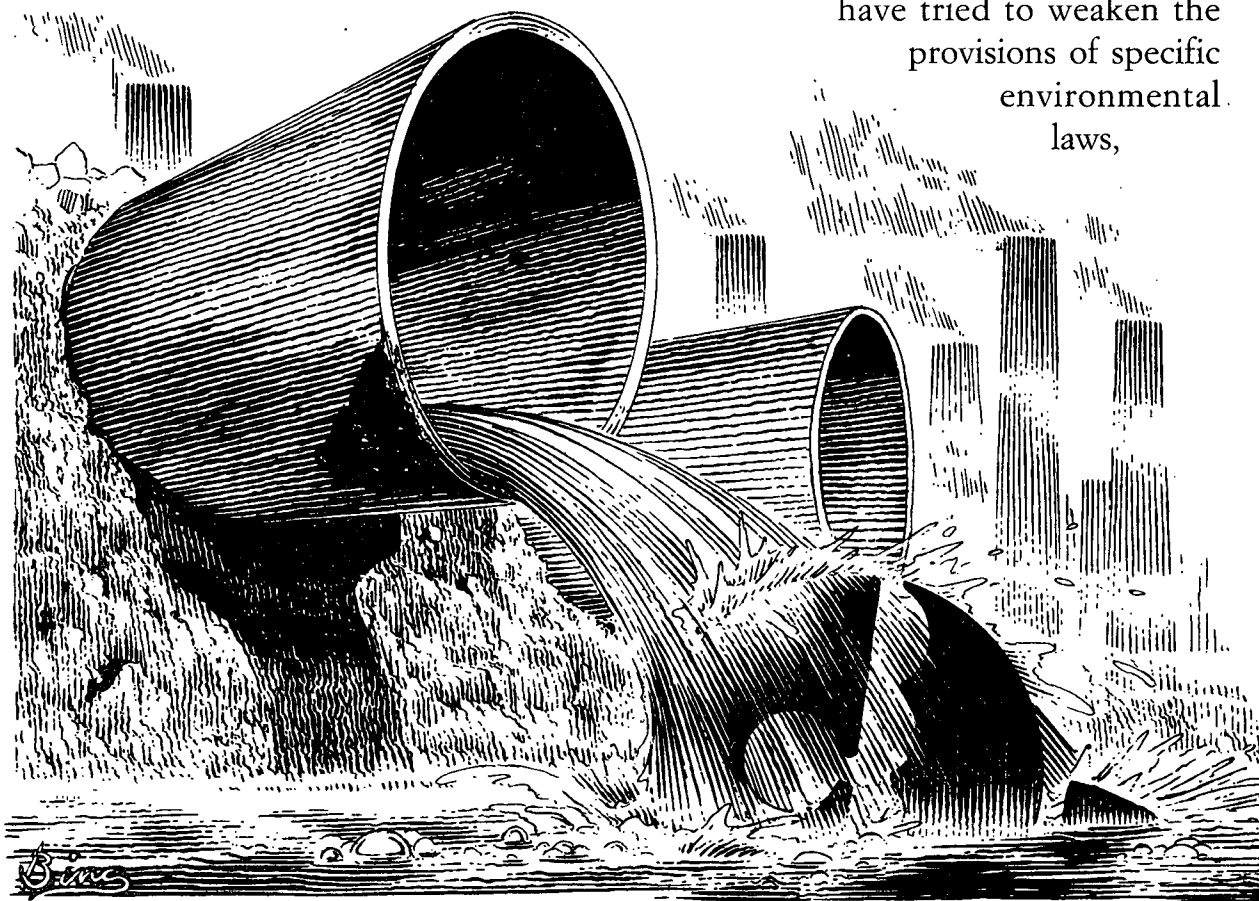
HOW LOBBYISTS POISONED THE EPA

BY ROBERT DREYFUSS

When 58 House Republicans bucked their party leadership in November and voted down 17 budget riders designed to give particular industries special dispensation from environmental laws, it seemed like the corporate lobbyists had finally been beaten back. Until then, the story of environmental legislation in the 104th Congress was of unprecedented industry influence—corporate lawyers for well-known polluters ghostwriting amendments, even whole bills.

But the November victory over the budget riders was hardly conclusive. Although the riders represented the most egregious giveaways, the Republicans have offered their corporate sponsors lots of other goodies. They

have tried to weaken the provisions of specific environmental laws,



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from the Clean Water Act to the Safe Drinking Water Act and Superfund. They have sought generally to curtail federal rule-making by setting steep cost-benefit tests and creating new opportunities for polluters to go to court. And, while insisting that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal departments justify regulation with more data, they have sought to cut the EPA's budget by 23 percent, effectively hamstringing the agency's standard-setting and enforcement capacity.

At this writing, President Clinton is defending the EPA and threatening to veto the efforts to nullify the nation's environmental laws. But at least some of the Republican measures are likely to make it into a final budget deal, and even the proposals dropped from the budget, such as the 17 infamous riders, will return attached to other legislation. What follows is the tale of how some of these provisions became part of the Republican budget.

CEMENTING AN ALLIANCE

Congressman Joe Barton's Sixth District of Texas is splattered across suburban Dallas, touching Fort Worth and Arlington in disconnected, Rorschachian blotches resembling a gerrymanderer's nightmare. Lodged in one blotch is Midlothian, the self-proclaimed "cement capital of the world," home to several cement plants, including one operated by Texas Industries. That plant, according to Barton's office, collects and burns hazardous waste to fire its factory.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Barton is a close ally of the cement industry. As chairman of the oversight subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee, he also happens to be a key player on environmental issues and chief gatekeeper over the Clean Air Act. Another friend to the cement industry is Jim Chapman, a fellow Republican, who represents Texas's rural First District, which roughly neighbors Barton's and is nestled along the Oklahoma and Arkansas borders. Last summer, according to sources on Capitol Hill, Chapman convinced some friends in the Republican majority to attach a modest rider to a House Appropriations Committee spending bill, the one governing, among other things, the Environmental Protection Agency.

Little noticed at first, cloaked in technical language, the rider would have prevented the EPA from issuing or enforcing strict standards to control air pollution created by cement kilns that burn

hazardous waste. Because the EPA is currently developing combustion rules intended to limit public exposure to the emission of dioxin, mercury, and other pollutants from these facilities, the rider would effectively have cut off the EPA at the knees while saving the cement industry tens of millions of dollars. According to an EPA background paper, "The rider will likely have the immediate effect of creating less stringent emission standards for a universe of the 190 or so incinerators, cement kilns and aggregate kilns that burn hazardous waste as fuels." About 24 cement kilns burn such waste, and the EPA estimates that each would be required to install between \$1.4 and \$1.8 million worth of antipollution equipment.

Chapman's suggestion got a warm reception from the House Republican leadership, including Appropriations Committee chairman Bob Livingston of Louisiana and the relevant subcommittee chairman, Jerry Lewis of California. Livingston and Lewis, in turn, shipped a copy of the cement industry rider over to Barton, for his approval, and of course, they got it. The rider became one of the infamous 17 that made it into the House appropriations bill.

How is it possible that the cement industry managed to win such an explicit, narrowly focused favor buried deep inside a multibillion-dollar appropriations bill? The flow of campaign money provides a good hint. The cement industry had raised enormous sums of money for the Republican Party. On May 16, 1995, Richard Creighton, president of the American Portland Cement Alliance (APCA), took his place at the head table as one of three cochairs of the "1995 Republican Senate-House Dinner," a fundraising gala that pulled in millions of dollars for the Republican Party's campaigns. An April 28 memo from Senator Paul Coverdell, Republican of Georgia, cites Creighton as one of "our top fundraisers" and lists him as having raised \$161,500.

"You don't buy influence," Creighton says. "The money doesn't impress the legislators." Creighton himself is impressed, however, by the sheer number of political action committee (PAC) solicitations he gets. "I had a call from a congresswoman asking if we would support her for a fundraiser on [November 1]," he said. For that one day he had 14 invitations, ranging in price from \$500 to \$1,000. "We will sit down in the office, review those seeking financial support, and decide

whether that particular member is someone who we believe deserves our support.”

Creighton says the work on this particular rider was handled not by his group but by a related cement industry group, the Cement Kiln Recycling Coalition (CKRC), though the two cement groups have members in common. Remarkably, unusual technical language used in a July 1995 petition to the EPA by a law firm paid by CKRC appears, word for word, in the cement kiln rider that was attached to the appropriations bill just a few weeks later. According to an EPA paper, “It is hard to draw any other conclusion than that the bill language came directly from a downtown law firm.”

On the day that the House convened to begin debate on the merits of the 17 riders, including the one pertaining to cement kilns—the vote was postponed—the House chaplain began the proceeding with an unintentional reminder of how the Congress all too often works. “Remember,” he intoned, “it is in giving that we receive.” The cement industry could not agree more.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

The attack on Superfund is another case study in the changing nature of lobbyist influence and the willingness of Republicans to ignore traditional congressional procedures in order to ram through industry-friendly legislation.

Created in 1980 by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, the Superfund program is responsible for emergency response and cleanup at tens of thousands of hazardous-waste sites, contaminated by chemical and oil dumps, leaking underground tanks, and abandoned industrial sites. Nearly 1,300 Superfund priority sites are listed as needing urgent attention.

Partly funded out of general tax revenues, the Superfund program is also financed by a tax on oil and chemical companies, much to the companies’ dislike. A much wider circle of companies is concerned about Superfund because of actual or potential liability for the cleanup of toxic-waste dumps, since the law holds polluters liable for cleaning up messes they have made. When the Republicans came to power in Congress, dozens of oil, chemical, transportation, and industrial firms, along with major insurance companies, joined the Superfund Reform ‘95 coalition and began their frontal assault.

Three distinct offensives emerged. The overall

regulatory reform bill promised to paralyze Superfund enforcement by imposing onerous cost-benefit analyses and inviting even more tangled litigation over existing sites. Wholesale budget cuts of up to 36 percent (\$560 million) threatened to “restrict and slow cleanups in hundreds of communities nationwide,” according to the EPA. And under the stewardship of Representative Mike Oxley, chairman of the hazardous materials subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee, a drastic rewrite of the Superfund law itself was under consideration.

But while concentrating on different areas of the Superfund machine, the offensives all followed the same basic process:

Step One: The Cash Flows. Republican Mike Oxley’s Fourth District of Ohio is located in the heart of the Corn Belt in the north central part of the state, filled with farms and small towns. Unlike areas in such states as New Jersey, Texas, and Louisiana, Ohio’s Fourth does not rank high on the list of congressional districts containing Superfund sites. In 1994, Oxley was so popular that he managed to win 100 percent of the vote, doubtless because he had no opponent. Yet, to scare off ghostly challengers, Oxley raised more than \$470,000 during the 1993-94 cycle. Nearly two-thirds of that sum came from PACs, and 99 percent of the PAC total derived from business PACs, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) reports.

Nearly \$45,000 of that total—about 10 percent of Oxley’s 1993-94 campaign receipts—came from companies that belong to Superfund Reform ‘95, according to the Environmental Information Center, using FEC data. And, says the EIC, “With the exception of one Ohio business, all these contributions came from outside Oxley’s state. Who is he representing?” In all, since 1989, Oxley has pulled in \$321,310 from corporate PACs representing industries that have a direct interest in reducing their liability under Superfund, the EIC reports.

Step Two: The Partnership Develops. Like the cement kiln rider, Oxley’s Superfund reform bill appears to have been written not by Commerce Committee staff but by the American Petroleum Institute (API) and the National Environmental Development Association (NEDA), another industry group. After a series of meetings between Superfund Reform ‘95 lawyers and lobbyists with Oxley’s staff in August, lawyers for API and NEDA presented draft bills to the committee. When the

EIC compared the language in the industry-written drafts to that of an official Commerce Committee draft of the bill, entire sections appeared lifted virtually verbatim from one to the other.

So closely did Oxley's staff follow industry's lead in transcribing the lobbyist-provided language that in one case they got the name of their own bill wrong. While Oxley called his bill "The Reform of Superfund Act," the API called the bill "The Superfund Reform Act"—a name that shows up in at least one paragraph of the actual bill.

"We did not write that bill at all," says API spokesman Joe Lastelic. "We provided the information they desired. And the committee decided that's the language they wanted to use." Lastelic says that it is an "error" to think that money from the oil industry sways votes on the Hill. But he readily admits that oil industry PACs give money to elect members of Congress that favor their point of view. "That's the way the system in America works," he says. "There's no way to get elected without money in this country, is there?"

Oil and gas PACs, among the most generous givers to Congress, apparently understand this. In 1993-94, according to data gathered from the FEC by the Center for Responsive Politics, oil and gas PACs pumped \$6.3 million into congressional campaigns. Exxon's PAC sent \$495,000 into the treasuries of federal campaigns, 94 percent of which went to Republican candidates.

Theresa Larson, who coordinates Superfund work for the National Association of Manufacturers, acknowledges that the climate has changed significantly since the new Republican majority was elected. "The doors are more open for us to get our two cents in," she says, with some understatement.

Step Three: Congress Rushes to Judgment. Changing the enormously complex Superfund law, especially over the resistance of most Democrats and a growing bloc of moderate, pro-environment GOP members—not to mention a presidential veto—was daunting to the Superfund Reform '95 group. Early on, a version of the legislation Oxley introduced was modified to take into account the concerns of less radical legislators.

Yet Karen Florini, senior attorney at the Environmental Defense Fund and a specialist on Superfund, says Oxley's committee gave her group short shrift. The EDF could not meet with the committee before the draft bill was released, and

had only one pro forma meeting afterward, she says, to no avail. In testimony before Oxley's subcommittee on October 18, Velma Smith of Friends of the Earth said that the bill "abandons the notion of restoration" and offers no more than "fences and filters on the tap." (Because the bill would scale back efforts to clean up many Superfund sites and instead opt to contain them, critics of the Oxley bill refer to it as "Superfence.")

NAM's Larson is pleased that Oxley is so eager to move the bill quickly. Along with Commerce Committee chairman Thomas Bliley of Virginia, and Pennsylvania's Bud Shuster, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and chief sponsor of the bill revising the Clean Water Act, Oxley is "excited to be in the leadership" and working hard. "They're saying, 'Let's show 'em we are doers,'" Larson says with satisfaction.

Given the fact that the most radical revisions of Superfund and the Clean Water Act stand little or no chance of being enacted into law, however, what accounts for the fact that Oxley, Bliley, and Shuster are so willing to drive industry-authored extremist bills so hard? Because whether or not the bill eventually becomes law, such abject favor-currying by key committee chairmen is almost guaranteed to pay off in the form of continued substantial PAC contributions in 1996. In the queer calculus of Capitol Hill dealmaking, the end result matters less than what side you are on: Just show the PACs that you are a "doer."

HOW INDUSTRY SPELLS RELIEF

Even if moderates pare the most radical bills, the Republicans' regulatory reform and drastic cuts in the EPA and Superfund budgets will neuter federal enforcement of existing laws. The story of regulatory reform in the 104th Congress is perhaps the most egregious example of Big Business literally setting the agenda, writing the legislation, and then guiding it through the legislative process with the full cooperation of the House and Senate leadership. The regulatory bill, the "Jobs Creation and Wage Enhancement Act" (H.R. 9), and its Senate companion would hurl dozens of monkey wrenches into the machinery of the federal government's regulatory machine. (See David C. Vladeck and Thomas O. McGarity, "Paralysis by Analysis," *TAP*, Summer 1995.)

Regulatory reform was Big Business's chief legislative agenda item in 1995, says John Cohen, executive director of the NAM's Alliance for Reasonable

Regulation. The ARR tirelessly worked regulatory reform during the year, along with a parallel organization representing smaller businesses, called Project Relief. Where the ARR brought together the large auto companies, steel makers, chemical firms, oil refiners, and the like, Project Relief was cobbled together by the kinds of medium-sized businesses that most fervently supported the Republican right and the Contract with America in 1994, and who maintain a lot of clout with Speaker Newt Gingrich and the crop of hard-edged Republican freshmen who viewed the Contract as the legislative equivalent of the Ten Commandments, only more so.

Together, ARR and Project Relief have literally tens of millions of dollars in campaign contributions at their disposal. Widely reported earlier in the year was the fact that Project Relief was established in close coordination with the office of Texas Republican Tom DeLay, the Republican majority whip, who received more than \$38,000 from businesses belonging to Project Relief. (In all, PACs linked to Project Relief funneled \$37 million to members of Congress from 1989 to 1994.) DeLay, along with Gingrich—who pulled in \$87,000 from Project Relief PACs during that period—and the House leadership, rammed H.R. 9 through a vote in the first 100 days of the new Congress. The *Washington Post* reported that 50 lobbyists from Project Relief firms served as lieutenants for DeLay and company in an all-out effort to win enough Democratic votes to make H.R. 9 veto proof. They almost succeeded, winning 51 Democrats in a 276-to-146 victory on February 23. "I don't think I've ever seen anything as blatant and naked as this was," says Gary Bass, coordinator of a coalition of consumer, labor, and environmental groups opposed to H.R. 9.

The course of regulatory reform became even more interesting in the Senate. There, almost from the beginning, Majority Leader Bob Dole took charge of the legislation, the Comprehensive Regulatory Reform Act (S. 343). Reaching out to a law firm that had a widely respected regulatory and government affairs practice, Dole hired Kyle McSllarrow from Hunton and Williams, an old-line Virginia firm with a

The industry's attack is convincing more environmental groups to support campaign finance reform.

high-powered Washington, D.C., office. In 1994 McSllarrow had run for Congress in northern Virginia and lost to Representative James Moran, a Democrat. But McSllarrow, who would become Dole's point man on regulatory issues, had been left with a significant campaign debt. Between the time that Dole announced McSllarrow's appointment in early January and his taking the position two months later, McSllarrow

reaped a windfall, picking up a steady stream of PAC contributions and big-dollar individual gifts to help retire his campaign debt. According to an accounting of McSllarrow's postelection fundraising put together by the Center for Responsive Politics from FEC data, McSllarrow pulled in more than \$29,000 in PAC contributions after Dole announced his new position, and, in one two-day period (February 13 and 14, 1995), another \$36,500 from individuals at a fundraiser, largely from Washington lawyers and lobbyists.

But Hunton and Williams did more than send a junior lawyer to Dole's staff. Hunton and Williams, which has long represented electric utilities, especially those that make use of polluting, coal-fired generating plants targeted by EPA, cast a wide net immediately after the election seeking clients willing to utilize Hunton and Williams as their Washington technicians in securing regulatory reform. (In addition to the Edison Electric Institute and Long Island Lighting Company, Hunton and Williams also represented AT&T, Philip Morris, a number of drug companies, utilities, General Electric, and Digital Equipment Corporation.) As in the case of the cement kiln rider, the Superfund bill, and the revised Clean Air Act, special interest attorneys were openly involved in writing key sections of S. 343. Three Hunton and Williams lawyers, George Freeman, Turner Smith, and Henry Nickel, took charge of a briefing on March 29 for members on both sides of the aisle for the Senate Judiciary Committee, demonstrating far more knowledge of S. 343 than Larry Block, the committee's staff director.

Hunton and Williams's unashamed involvement in the legislative process led Ralph Nader's Public Citizen to file a complaint with the Senate Ethics Committee charging that the briefing violated

Senate rules by "turning over the formal pre-markup staff briefing on the meaning of legislation to outside lobbyists." Unsurprisingly, the Ethics Committee rejected the complaint.

But Hunton and Williams hardly lowered its profile. When Dole's bill ran into trouble on the Senate floor—Dole was three times unable to win enough votes for closure on debate over the bill—the firm joined the Alliance for Reasonable Regulation in a quiet, behind-the-scenes effort to win a handful of Democratic votes. (The Republicans were solidly united behind S. 343, with the 30 cosponsors of the legislation having received a total of \$6.6 million from members of Project Relief and the Chemical Manufacturers Association from 1989 through March 1995, according to an analysis by Citizen Action.)

The champion for the renewed push to win Senate approval of Dole's regulatory reform bill was none other than Virginia Democrat Charles Robb. And Robb, it turns out, is an alumnus of Hunton and Williams and maintains close connection with his former law partners. Beginning in August, Robb quietly began canvassing Democratic senators to see whether they would support some sort of slightly modified version of Dole's S. 343.

The Dole-Robb alliance was openly brokered by the Alliance for Reasonable Regulation. "We encouraged Robb's and Dole's staffs to talk to each other," says ARR's Cohen. "They know what our bottom line is, so we don't need to be at the table when they meet." And, concerning the bottom line, an analysis of FEC data by the Environmental Information Center shows that Robb received nearly \$40,000 in 1993-94 from Hunton and Williams attorneys and clients, along with an additional \$90,000 from corporations that support S. 343.

THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE WAR

The assault on the environment continues on so many fronts that it is difficult to keep track of all of them: the opening of Alaskan forests to private industry, the evisceration of the Endangered Species Act, the selling-off of federal lands in the West, and the favors granted to timber, mining, and ranching interests, and more.

Despite the never-ending flow of campaign cash from special interests seeking "relief" from environmental protection laws, however, there are many signs that even within the Republican Party there is growing unease about the scope and pace

of the environmental attack. Both polls and the hands-on experience of members of Congress who go back to their districts show that such measures are not supported by public opinion.

Thus, the Republican bloc is fraying at the edges. "We won 16 Republican votes in the House against the regulatory relief measures in the Contract with America, then 34 Republican votes against undoing the Clean Water Act, and finally 51 Republicans who voted against the EPA appropriations bill," said Gene Karpinski of U.S. PIRG. Of course, later 58 Republicans joined the Democrats to stall, at least temporarily, the GOP onslaught. "When members go back home and ask, do we want to weaken environmental laws, the answer is resoundingly no," he says.

The sheer power of the various business coalitions now attacking environmental rules is convincing more and more environmental groups to support campaign finance reform. Campaign contribution reports from the Center for Responsive Politics, Public Citizen, Citizen Action, and other groups have sparked more awareness of the problem among environmental advocates. Such new activist centers as the Environmental Working Group and the Environmental Information Center are rapidly building PAC databases to use as weapons in the battle to protect the environment. The Sierra Club, which is currently debating its own stand on campaign finance reform, has a PAC that it uses to defend pro-environment candidates in close races. According to Dan Weiss of Sierra, the Sierra Club PAC spent \$600,000 in 1992 and another \$400,000 in 1994 in support of House and Senate candidates, and Weiss cites four races in 1994 in which Sierra's campaign contributions may have provided pro-environmentalist Democrats the margin for victory: Connecticut's Sam Gejdenson, New York's Maurice Hinchey, Oregon's Elizabeth Furse, and California's Jane Harman. But Weiss admits, "We are never going to outspend Exxon, GM, Georgia-Pacific, and other special interests."

The 58 Republican votes in support of the EPA are ultimately more than a slap at the lobbyists; they testify to the continuing grassroots appeal of environmentalism, almost unique among liberal causes. Twenty-five years after the first Earth Day, the environmentalist ethic has become part of the American creed and proven strong enough to withstand even the ferocity and cohesion of the Gingrich onslaught. Even money has its limits. □

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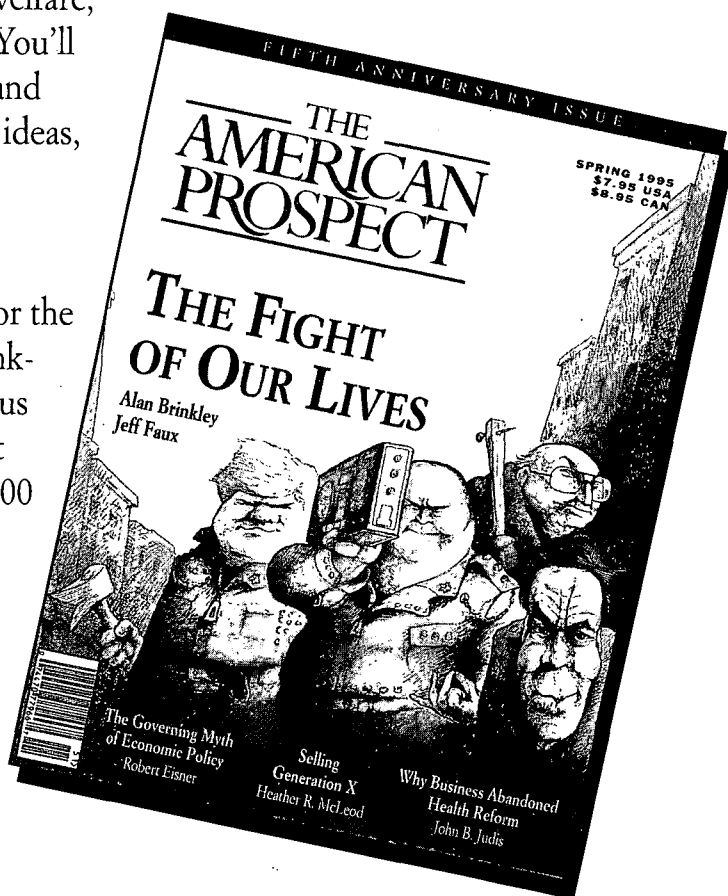
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COME THE DEVOLUTION

BY LENNY GOLDBERG

One of the Republicans' many ideological coups has been their ability to cast important questions of federalism in wholly conservative terms. In the new Republican demonology, liberals are centralists, favoring Washington while resisting local decisions and initiatives. Conservatives offer a decentralist new paradigm, returning, in the immortal words of born-again decentralist Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, "power to the people."

Dole's appropriation of a 1960s new-left slogan unintentionally acknowledges the ambiguity of the decentralizing impulse. In the 1960s, community activists sought to empower local groups and individuals in the opposition to a corporatized, centralized warfare-welfare state. In the 1990s, the right uses the same power-to-the-people

rhetoric to attack 60 years of liberal policies that have been anchored by federal laws, standards, and fiscal resources. The empty slogan, of course, avoids all the important questions of government: what power to what people, under what set of laws, institutions, and values?

Three things are noteworthy about this debate. First, a close look at the Dole-Gingrich brand of "devolution" reveals less a principled philosophy of federalism than a series of opportunistic forays, often contradictory. Second, the Democrats, after a few promising false starts, have fumbled a legitimate issue and allowed the Republicans to impose their own conception. And third, despite the big dose of hypocrisy in the Republican package, decentralism and community empowerment remain worthy goals for progressives. The issue is too important to simply cede to the right.

DECEPTIVE DEVOLUTION

The Gingrich revolution would roll back both the social advances associated with the New Deal-Great Society and the role of national government as guarantor. Much of what is packaged as devolution is simply opportunism. If entitlements cannot be eliminated directly, their elimination can be disguised as a block grant. The block grant for Aid to

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Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) over time would force state-level rationing of a program that once guaranteed income support for needy families, potentially shifting burdens to already overstrapped foster care and child welfare systems. Limited federal support for Medicaid would intensify rationing of health care. The school lunch block grant would effectively eliminate the entitlement to that program. Since the poor are not the most popular claimants for state aid, it adds up to a massive rollback of income support.

The right rails about unfunded mandates, but the Gingrich brand of devolution creates unfunded liabilities. States already in competition with each other to lower taxes to attract business will now be forced to slash programs for the poor and disadvantaged. This looming "race to the bottom" is not a function of the mean-spiritedness of states and localities. Rather, it stems from changes in federal-state relations that would create inexorable downward fiscal pressures on the safety net.

Often the right's preferred level of government is purely a matter of expediency. For example, Republicans complain about a federal requirement that San Diego build a sewage treatment plant—intrusive, micromanaging environmentalism, according to Gingrich, a means of protecting the ocean according to the EPA. California Governor

Pete Wilson refuses to implement the federal motor-voter law because it is not paid for (and because it might register too many new voters). But neither Pete Wilson nor any other governor (or Republican congressman, for that matter) has complained about perhaps the most intrusive new unfunded mandate now being implemented nationwide: the requirement passed in the Bush administration for mandatory, repeated drug testing programs for all transportation and public safety employees, a program that will cost state and local governments billions of dollars on an ongoing basis, ostensibly because localities would not otherwise protect the public from drug-crazed bus drivers and police officers.

In the 1995 rewrite of the crime bill, the House Republicans demanded: Don't tell the locals how to fight crime. So they eliminated categorical crime prevention and police officer funding. But at the same time, they offered the states new prison money—but only if states strengthen their sentencing laws to keep felons in jail for 85 percent of their sentences, irrespective of local statutes, sentencing, and parole decisions. The Democrats were little better. The categorical crime prevention program was in fact a mess, only accessible by those capable of hustling grants from the Department of Justice. Clinton's defense of money earmarked for the thin blue line of police officers may have been good politics, winning support from chiefs and cops, but it is a trap for the locals, who are hard-pressed to turn down federal largess for cops on the street—and will be hard-pressed to lay those cops off when the federal money runs out, as it does very quickly in the Clinton police program.

A second closely related hypocrisy involves interest group politics. Powerful special interests seek centralized power via uniform federal standards if the locals go too far. For example, Republicans want to restrict product liability nationally because they have failed at the state level. Alternatively, the special interests seek local control when they don't like federal restrictions, such as federal lands policy in the west. Energy utilities readily move from state public utilities commissions to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and back again, seeking their advantage irrespective of any principle of state or federal jurisdiction. This is less new-paradigm devolution than old-fashioned venue shopping.

OPPORTUNISM IN SEARCH OF IDEOLOGY

Over the years, conservative theorists here and in Europe have articulated thoughtful versions of devolution and "subsidiarity"—the idea that government action should be carried out at the lowest possible level that can perform it competently. But in the current Republican conception, amid the myriad hypocrisies and opportunisms, it is hard to find a principled core.

Two conservative theorists of devolution, William Eggers and John O'Leary of the Reason Foundation, extol the flexibility and antibureaucracy of localism in *Revolution at the Roots*, a sort of *Reinventing Government* of the right. The principles here, however, call for limitation on all government action through tax restrictions, and "transferring responsibility from government to individuals, families, and voluntary associations." Not only should the central government be transferred downward to local government, but local government should also do less and should have less money. This is less a theory of decentralized government than pure libertarianism.

James Pinkerton, a former Bush aide, claimed a conservative "new paradigm" of decentralization and empowerment—initially a group of examples in search of a theory such as self-management, ownership of public housing projects, and school vouchers. His latest book, subtitled *The End of Big Government—and the New Paradigm Ahead*, oddly includes not only medical savings accounts and school vouchers—but also a revival of FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps.

The ostensible historical and theoretical inevitability of devolution is also touted in the "Third Wave" of futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler. In the new information society, information is so widely dispersed and decisions have to be made so continually that centralism is impossible and government is on perpetual overload. Just as corporations have decentralized their decisionmaking, just as mass markets have fragmented, just as diversifying subgroups of the population make increasingly diverse demands, so must government decentralize decisionmaking. Thus, devolution of the central government is an inevitable trend that makes government consistent with the new decentralized economy and society. The Tofflers are neither entirely wrong nor entirely conservative: They celebrate diversity, environmentalism, feminism, and

civil rights. But on close examination, they would wish away all bureaucracy without any examination of the appropriate role of government, particularly the need to maintain a well-functioning infrastructure that keeps the society running.

In short, it is difficult to find any consistent concept of devolution either in the theorists or in the actions of the Republican Congress. Conservatives would overthrow the most local of regulatory decisions—land use law—by extending “takings” theory to many local regulatory actions. A recent Medicare reform proposal would allow doctors to form health plans that would be exempt from strict state financial accountability standards. The state responsibility to protect its citizens from defective products would be overridden by a weakened national product liability standard. The policy seems to follow the constituency: If ranchers on federal lands want local control but cable companies insist on local preemption, so be it. The Tenth Amendment—delegating powers to the states—should be in play on, for example, abortion, until a fifth antiabortion vote on the Supreme Court outlaws it entirely.

Like President Reagan’s “New Federalism” proposals of the early 1980s, the Republican proposals devolve precisely the wrong programs in the wrong ways. Then, Democrats swallowed some funding cuts but blocked the dismantling of federal responsibility. This time around, the Democrats’ response to devolution has been ineffectual and sometimes incoherent.

HOW DEMOCRATS DROPPED THE BALL

As a candidate for president, Bill Clinton brought a critical governor’s eye to excessive federal micromanagement. The Democratic Leadership Council, likewise, has made decentralization an essential tenet of being a “new” Democrat. Budget director Alice Rivlin’s most recent book, *Reviving the American Dream: the Economy, the States and the Federal Government*, written just before she joined the administration, advocated a wholesale devolution of major federal programs. Vice President Gore’s National Performance Review calls federal-state relationships “fundamentally broken.” And this administration has demonstrated a far greater willingness than previous ones to grant waivers to the states to permit greater innovation, experimentation, and flexibility. So what went wrong?

First, Gingrich, Dole, and company pursued a much more aggressive and populist-sounding version of decentralization. Pre-Gingrich, all of this was policy-wonk stuff: federalism, intergovernmental relations, unfunded mandates, and the like have long been yawners in the hierarchy of hot public policy issues—which, alas, is how the Clinton administration treated them. Gingrich’s great achievement has been to transform a nuts-and-bolts discussion of how government should operate into grand ideology to whip the Democrats and dismantle the New Deal.

Second, the administration had many opportunities but failed to project any unifying vision of government. For example, the National Performance Review easily could have been cast as a decentralist program that breaks down unnecessary federal bureaucratic functions and devolves power to local decisionmakers. Instead, as deficit mania intensified, it has been promoted mainly as an attempt to save money. The administration’s much-maligned health care plan, labeled big government incarnate, in fact gave much power and flexibility to the states and even regions to run their own programs—although few others than state-level activists knew it. In health and human services, where the administration has given states broad waivers to innovate, only insiders—public officials, policy advocates, and inhabitants of places like the National Conference of State Legislatures or the Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations—have ever cared.

Further, a lot of this stuff is intrinsically of interest only to the interest groups and government functionaries who live and die by it. The difficulty of exciting the public about a principled and non-opportunistic version of devolution is partly a function of its numbing detail. In a federal system (yawn), every single program has its own set of intergovernmental issues. Every public policy area has an involved and evolved set of federal, state, and local relationships that have far more to do with institutional histories, the predilections of long-powerful congressional chairs, and lobbying groups with particular preferences than with any coherent federalist principles. Many state bureaucrats are actually happy to have federal restrictions, which offer an all-purpose excuse for failure to innovate.

It took incredible Republican packaging to place something as boring as “unfunded mandates” onto the front burner of national policy, even as the legis-

lation itself fails dismally to relieve localities of some of the more onerous and stupid of these actual mandates. Thus even the most astute commentators have missed the fact that Clinton potentially offers a smarter and more serious version of decentralization. Michael Kelly, writing in the *New Yorker*, understands why Gingrich would be proposing devolution, but is shocked that the Clinton administration would even halfheartedly take up this banner. Democrats came into office this time with a sensible view of devolution—but the issue got lost in the Democratic Party's general retreat.

Let's pause to recall why much of the post-1933 liberal agenda has necessarily increased the reach of the national government. Democrats in this century have relied on the federal government to secure broad gains for the majority of people. In the sweep of New Deal social insurance programs, its (partial) extension to health care in the 1960s, the triumph of civil rights over states' rights, and the need for national environmental protection, Democrats have rightly advanced the power of the federal government to provide the basic rights and protections of citizenship. For several generations, Democrats have fought against the ravages of an inhumane, anti-ecological marketplace and the perceived lack of concern by corrupt or inept state governments for their own citizenry. If devolution and decentralization means abandoning these advances, then the *New Yorker* is right to be shocked, and the Democrats are right to fight against these efforts.

In truth, since the New Deal the dominant mode of thought—governing paradigm, if you will—has been centralism of both a progressive and conservative nature. Liberal centralism describes the New Deal postwar consensus. Conservative centralists have long believed in a powerful military and an extensive domestic and international security and intelligence state.

Though it is sometimes forgotten, progressives have often fought to maintain, not eliminate, local regulatory powers and the design of programs to fit local needs. They have built an extensive set of community-based institutions—from Head Start to community development corporations to workplace committees on occupational safety and health—which began in opposition to the established bureaucratic order; and have envisioned human scale and participatory institutions.

DECENT DEVOLUTION

Just as there are both conservative and liberal brands of centralism, there are both progressive and reactionary forms of decentralism. Since so much of the congressional program is simply ideological and is aimed at the poor, it is tempting to dismiss devolution as a smokescreen. Richard Reeves, for example, observes that the use of federal power in American history has meant progress over slavery, oppression, and economic backwardness. The *Washington Monthly* has derided "devolution chic" by collecting numerous examples of corruption and venality at the local level. The *New York Times* questions whether state legislatures, many of them part-time and burdened by term limits, can rise to the task of making intelligent decisions about programs.

But the irony remains: Much of the thrust of recent progressive movements was antibureaucratic, anticentralist, and focused on empowerment of community and individuals. The civil rights movement sought fundamental personal and community rights based on decentralized moral witness—but required the full power of the federal government to establish and enforce those rights.

One of the most significant policy and institutional contributions of the progressive movements of the 1960s has been the rise of community-based nonprofit agencies—public-private partnerships, if you will—as a key element in direct service delivery, in battered women's shelters, child care agencies, community development corporations, and community health clinics, among many diverse variations on the theme. The antiwar movement long called for shrinking the bureaucratic national security state and its dependent corporations. The women's movement is fundamentally about empowerment: The personal became political at the most individual and community level. The environmental movement developed the most visionary decentralist perspectives: think globally, act locally; small is beautiful; create "human scale" institutions and bio-regional governments.

The right does not own this issue. We need to sort through what the federal government does best while identifying where devolution can and should work. The following is only an outline of a much broader discussion and debate.

Rights. The first concern of any progressive like Reeves, who gets nervous about devolution, is civil rights and civil liberties. Guaranteed constitutional

rights and civil liberties, like many other federal responsibilities, are simply not devolvable. As these rights become clarified by federal action or decisions—for example Miranda rights, abortion rights—they cannot be abrogated by localities.

This principle, however obvious, helps clarify the debate on unfunded mandates. If the constitutional right to an attorney is established, the fact that localities have to pay for public defenders is simply the cost that government must bear to guarantee the people their legal rights, not a federal mandate. Access for the disabled to public buildings and public transportation costs states and localities money; but since access and mobility for the disabled are legislated as a right of citizenship, not only public but private costs (disabled access to businesses) are simply the costs of serving all citizens.

But this argument goes only so far. Establishing a right to health care, for example, does not mean that local government can be mandated to provide it without financing. For the federal government to ensure rapid implementation of disability access, it should provide the funding. In general, the most effective and important intervention of the federal government is precisely what Gingrich is trying to destroy: federal financing.

Funding. The most critical programmatic function of the federal government is financing. The Social Security program is at once the most centralized and the most empowering program of all: The computer system and bureaucracy guarantee income without strings for millions of individuals, delivered to their doorstep. Supplemental Security Income empowers the disabled, blind, and very poor elderly with the ability to survive. The Medicare system permits millions of elderly to seek their own health care with (until now perhaps) substantial choice. So far, no one has suggested that the states take over income maintenance or medical care for the elderly for many good reasons, such as the fact of interstate personal mobility and the states' limited fiscal resources.

As Alice Rivlin has noted in her otherwise favorable treatment of devolution, devolving entitlement programs would place an unthinkable burden on the states, a burden that only the federal government is fiscally capable of carrying. Thus, entitlement programs that assure that poor children have income support, medical care, a home without abuse, and sufficient food must be federally financed. Seen this way, a simple child allowance

program like that of most Western countries becomes a far more fair and efficient means of providing family support than the AFDC system, particularly one run by the states.

Federal financial power must necessarily extend to functions that the states will not or cannot undertake. Basic research, which is distributed to many locations, benefits no state or particular industry immediately but is arguably critical to long-term economic growth. A public broadcasting system, based on local stations that raise much of their own money, would have been impossible without federal financing. One can argue the legitimacy of many federal expenditures; but one cannot argue that the states can afford these broader expenditures.

Flexibility. The devolutionary aspect of federal financing should be local program flexibility. To oversimplify, the federal government must finance efforts to remedy problems; community efforts should receive every incentive to provide the solutions. The most effective programs are often those that come from the bottom up—the community development, job training, family service, and community clinic programs that fill the voids that the legislative process or the regulatory bureaucracy could not envision.

Where the federal government wants specific behavior or change, it should use incentives: In child support, for example, federal policy currently provides incentive payments to pay for the states and localities to improve collections, with limited program specifications on how the job gets done. (The program has encountered its greatest problems with federal specifications for computerization.) Such flexible programs as the Land and Water Conservation Fund encourage localities to invest in environmental improvements with a minimum of regulatory oversight. Categorical requirements for program and service delivery, representing well-intentioned efforts to replicate solutions, so often break down in the implementation.

Variety. As a corollary, the federal government must get used to developing enforceable standards without dictating how to get there. It is a national standard that children have the right to be free from an abusive or seriously neglectful environment. But child abuse advocates complain that there are a range of frequently contradictory family reunification requirements combined with child protection requirements that put community agencies, child protective services, courts, and families at cross-pur-

poses. If the states or the counties are not doing the job, there must be a federal right of action that could potentially dictate drastic and expensive solutions. But in many cases—such as misguided efforts to deny states money based on their formal child abuse statutes or technical violations of federal statute—the heavy federal hand does little good and adds nothing but cost and complexity.

Empowerment. Amid all the talk of individual empowerment, conservatives are attempting to preempt community empowerment. True devolution would set baseline standards for regulation but would permit stronger action at the local level. Many corporate lobbying efforts in environment and other regulatory issues attempt to preempt local action by setting national standards; any real concern for local democracy, which is given lip service in the current debate, would maintain the ability of localities to expand on national standards.

For example, energy utilities are currently seeking federal regulatory action to preempt the ability of municipalities to buy power on behalf of their own citizens when energy markets are restructured to be competitive; phone utilities have successfully used the Federal Communications Commission to overturn state efforts to protect privacy rights of their consumers from caller ID; the cable industry has successfully sought federal preemption from local regulation of local monopolies. The opportunities for state and community actions and innovations are many, but they are often stifled by limitations enacted at the behest of powerful interests.

Another aspect of community empowerment is one that began in the 1960s—the direct relationships between the community-based sector and federal funding. Many nonprofit community organizations were stimulated by the War on Poverty; assessments of community needs led to health clinics and many other programs that, when successful, have lasted. Devolving program funding has strengthened both the public sector and the community-based sector in responding to community needs.

What functions should be directly devolved? In her book budget director Alice Rivlin calls for the states to take charge of the “productivity agenda” such as education and skills training, child care, housing, infrastructure, and economic development. “The following programs would be devolved to the states or gradually wither away: elementary and secondary education, job training, economic and community development, housing, most high-

ways and other transportation, social services, and some pollution control programs. . . . Citizens and organizations concerned about better housing, training, and education would have to lobby in their state capitals, not Washington.”

Rivlin’s case is strongest for devolving economic development functions, which also happen to be among the most pork-laden projects. In the absence of federal assistance and strings, competition among states will still be healthy over who has the best ports, highways, mass transit, and airports, the best job training, the lowest-cost energy, and the best quality of life.

Devolving “pork” means that many massive, costly, and environmentally destructive measures (such as California’s excessive water projects) would never be built if beneficiaries had to bear full cost. At the same time, other programs, such as housing and social services, need local variety but at least partial federal funding.

Pragmatism must still reign in an arena in which no strict set of principles will work. Head Start fits into no convenient typology of appropriate federal functions but has had strong support (until now) as an effective program. When Leon Panetta was asked if he does not trust the states to run the proposed revamped school lunch program, his response was, “It works.” It is easy to attack distant federal bureaucrats and cite absurd anecdotes about inappropriate regulations and bureaucratic intervention; it all too rare to hear defenses of effective programs.

Ultimately, progressives have to reclaim democratic empowerment as a politics. For most progressives and conservatives alike, the substance is more important than the structure: Advocates for interests or ideology care more about what is done than at what level the decision is made. But for those not directly involved in the public policy process—that is, the voting public—the sense of alienation from government and lack of control is deeply felt.

Efforts to bring decisions and participation closer to local communities may be an integral part of restoring connection to the political process. Devolving huge liabilities for social problems to state and local government is a recipe for disaster. Empowering communities and funding the responsibilities they have been given might help restore a sense that democracy can function.□

DEAR BROTHER SWEENEY

AN OPEN LETTER TO LABOR'S NEW LEADER

BY THOMAS GEOGHEGAN

With John Sweeney as the new president of the AFL-CIO, we now have a labor leader too militant for the New York Times. The Times is partly upset because Sweeney's union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), once blocked the Roosevelt Bridge in D.C., as part of the Justice for Janitors Campaign. In Washington this may be the one type of gridlock that can get the country moving.

There may be some symmetry in Sweeney's election as president of the AFL-CIO and the gutting of Medicare in the Republican House the same week. The historian Fernand Braudel observed an inverse relation between "the welfare state" and "labor militancy." In Europe, he wrote, labor was most militant before the welfare state took hold. Well, wasn't U.S. Labor stronger before the Great Society?

Does that mean Gingrich's moment is Sweeney's moment? Not yet, no. Sweeney's challenge is just to keep a spark alive, even if it's just 10 percent of the private sector, until there is a break in the political weather. But how does he do even this modest tending of the flame? Sweeney didn't ask me for my opinion, but I thought I'd give it anyway.

Dear Brother Sweeney,

I once had a Letterman-like "Top Ten List" of ways to keep Labor going. But in this era of downsizing, I have cut it to seven.

7. Move the headquarters south.

The whole country has moved there. Why not you? The South is where the people go. Where the jobs go. That's the real U.S., like it or not. The South is like being on television. If you aren't in the South, you don't exist. But as every organizer knows, people in the South regard Labor as a hostile, northern, "alien corn" kind of thing. So how to counter that? Move there. Leave Nora's, the Tabard Inn, the escalator at Dupont Circle, which is just dragging you down anyway. Follow the janitors, gardeners, home health aides to the South. By the next century, the word "South" should mean "Labor," the way it now means "Elvis imitator" or "grits."

Now I can hear the shrieking in D.C. "How can we leave?" "It's impractical, it's too expensive,

we've got to be close to the legislative action." Well, you can move down there slowly, very sloooowly . . . the way Helmut Kohl is moving to Berlin. Second, what do you do in D.C. anyway, except deal with a lot of southern politicians?

Go to the places they're from. And not Atlanta, either. We don't need to see union presidents in ballparks doing tomahawk chops on national TV.

No, I'd put headquarters in Texas. It will grow the fastest, and have the biggest influx of Hispanics, who tend to like unions. But not Austin, damn it. Not Austin, with the intellectuals and the hormone-free croissants. Something more austere, like Brownsville. When and if Labor gets back up to 15 percent of the private sector . . . then maybe we can start talking Austin.

6. Start a fight at the Democratic Convention.

Not a riot, just a fight. Father Andrew Greeley once said somewhere, "If you want people to notice you, start a fight." John L. Lewis, when he started the CIO, went out of his way to pick a fight with the old AFL, because it gets you noticed. So who do you start a fight with? The Democrats, of

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course. Now don't gasp. Of course, I'm for Clinton. I'm hardly in favor of a Third Party. Does the Christian Right start a Third Party? No, they take over the Republican one. But I am in favor of a big, splashy fight, and people would love it, as they loved it when Lewis blasted "Big Labor."

The fight I have in mind is not over Clinton, but the platform. Sit down and write your own platform, as a single seamless "Manifesto on Wages." The preamble should be, as you put it so well in your convention speech, "America needs a raise." Then go out of your way to say, "It's not Job Training, it's not anything we've been saying in the old platforms. . . . It's not the Government. Just: You're Getting Robbed at Work." And explain it.

Pitch out all those unreadable Democrat platforms of yore, and write one, around one idea: higher living standards.

- A guaranteed living wage, with profit sharing.
- A guaranteed four-week vacation for employees with five years or more, and a guarantee of three weeks to all with more than one year.
- A defined pension plan for all employees. Half the workforce are now in nothing.
- Unemployment compensation at one-half of salary, and two-thirds if it's not "business necessity."
- Labor courts for all, yes, all, even white male discharges (is that the right way to put it?).
- Full fringe benefits for part-timers and contract workers, to discourage the move to contingent work.

Better yet, take over the Democratic Party. There's no "there" there. If we can't take over the Democratic Party, there's no point in starting a third one.

Such a takeover may be a ten-year project. But do it like the Christian Right. Don't back "prolabor" candidates, run union people instead. They don't have to hold every office, as the Christian Right learned from Lenin or maybe the Mafia, but just be there at every level, at some key spot.

In Europe it makes sense to disentangle labor from the left or left-center party. But in Europe labor has a much stronger presence and center-left parties are serious about brokering social contracts. Here, for years to come, there is nothing to broker, because a labor movement scarcely exists and the Dems are so defensive. In effect, in the U.S. now, it might as well be 1880. When we get two sides to

the table again, then, then, we can talk about disentangling Labor and the Democratic Party again.

5. Form caucuses that cut across unions.

There is talk about turning Labor into an AARP. They say, "Since we can't raise wages, let's just offer 'services.'" Unions already offer Visa cards and the like. Now this is crazy. If Labor can't raise wages, what's the point? Raising wages is exactly what labor does in other countries, like northern Europe. All German labor does, really, is to raise wages. Many of the "services" that we provide through unions, grievance handling, etc., are done by the works councils there. Anyway, the First Service is just to raise people's wages.

But within Labor, for your own members, there can be more "services" to offer:

- Represent more people in pension grievances.
- Why not be their ombudsman with the HMOs?
- Start more "caucuses," with newsletters, 800 numbers, etc., that cut across old union lines.

For instance, what about a "Single Working Mothers' Caucus"? But I would offer these services only to union members. Maybe use them as bait to bring more people in, so you can raise more people's wages. An AARP-like organization such as the group Working Today, is a fine idea for the nonunion majority. It might even warm up more people to collective action. But this is work from which Labor should stay away.

4. Use direct democracy for more black (and Hispanic and female) leaders.

But don't ruin this with affirmative action. Unions already have many women and minorities. Just let more members vote directly for their top leaders, and it will produce more integrated leadership. If there were more rank-and-file elections, you'd have more stump speakers at the head of unions, and some would be African American, and Hispanic, and female. Soon, we'd have black (female, Hispanic) union leaders who can go on TV, or lead a march, or both.

It makes me cringe to see people, lamblike, go to the polls with no one, as in the old New Deal days, to articulate what their real interests are. Even the rich have their lawyers, right? The cynical majority need more people "like us" or who look "like us" just to tell them how to vote.

The great thing about Rich Trumka (Mineworkers) and Ron Carey (Teamsters) who led the

break with Lane Kirkland is that each man had his own authentic base. Each was elected by the rank and file.

You need someone who can lead, really lead, a Million Worker March for a \$7.00 minimum wage.

3. Organize! And pull in the kids.

Of course, you've already done this as well as anyone in the labor movement. You're the master. Maybe as wages fall the AFL-CIO may be this new refuge for kids who already know something is terribly wrong.

The Boss already senses this. The invites on the union-busting seminars now claim: "College kids are now organizers!" "College kids with nose rings ARE IN YOUR HOME STATE!" So keep doing what you're doing, only more so. Write to Gingrich, as I have, to kill Bill Clinton's national service corps. The best place for idealistic kids to go is into union organizing.

Organizing is also great public relations. There's no way a meeting of middle-aged guys in suits at Bal Harbour can generate a good story—and no way a bunch of kids organizing nursing-home workers can generate a bad one.

They say you're going to spend \$20 million on organizing. But as you know well, \$20 million is nothing. An SEIU organizer, whom I'd never seen, stopped me the other day and said, "Twenty million? In one city, Justice for Janitors can cost nine!" The legal battles go on for years. So how do you raise more?

- Tap the Strike Funds? How can you have a successful "strike" anyway until more people are organized? The UAW alone has a billion-dollar strike fund.
- Go to foundations? I think Lane Kirkland is still sitting on half of their boards. Which reminds me: Ask to get on every foundation board you can.
- Try living off the land, with an 800 number, like Jerry Brown. He raised a ton of money, in a few weeks, from frustrated ordinary people. You could spotlight one state at a time. A "Texas" fund for Texans. An "L.A." fund for Angelenos.

Plenty of nonunion liberals might send in a few bucks. I'd pledge, just as I do with public radio. Make it clear that the money goes only to organizers! Nobody wants to pay for a business agent.

2. Stop the fatalism about the global economy.

The more you complain about the global econo-

my, the more you encourage people to give up. First, how do you know it is the global economy? Is that what's driving down the wages of janitors? Have wages in other countries, like Germany, stagnated like ours?

Second, look around Labor today. How many negotiators, in their entire careers, deal with an employer's threat to move abroad? One out of twenty, if that? Mostly they threaten to move to the South. (See number one above.) The people you're going to organize—fast-food workers, nurses' aides, retail clerks, back-office workers—aren't threatened by jobs moving abroad.

1. Understand Media.

How about a good video! You can't get in company parking lots any more, thanks to a decision written by Clarence Thomas. But if parking lots are off-limits, we can still get in people's sets.

Perhaps we can get the stars to help. Go to the Hollywood Women's Political Caucus and say: "You really want to do something for women? Get them a higher wage . . . and shorter hours!"

Our side already has Whoopi Goldberg. How hard is it to add a Newman, or Barbara Streisand? Start changing the tone of the debate. Let's have a Cindy Crawford type saying, "Hey, I have an agent represent me . . . Why not have an agent represent YOU?" Or a Cal Ripken video on Showing up Daily on the Picket Line. And by the way, where is Norman Lear?

And if you can't afford TV, get on radio. Every week, at least once, in a major media market, you should have someone on talk radio. And open up Labor, from top to bottom, so everyone, shop steward, associate in-house counsel, the janitor who organizes—everyone can go on. Don't wait for one day a year, Labor Day, for the Big Boss.

Why not start a radio network, too? The FCC is handing out stations, on the new digital audio radio system, "DARS." No one listens to DARS now because no one has the sets. Twenty years ago, no one could play a compact disc. But there is a good chance, by 2020, DARS is all we'll listen to. Why isn't Labor lining up for channels?

Well, it will take more than Seven Ideas to change Labor. But I hope your very election has opened up the place to fresh thinking. If nothing else, remember: Your first job, as AFL-CIO president, is to get us out of D.C.

Fast. Before the Republicans block a bridge.□

MOVING FROM THE 'HOOD

THE MIXED SUCCESS OF INTEGRATING SUBURBIA

BY PETER DREIER AND DAVID MOBERG

Saxophone player Bill Clinton and blues legend Luther Allison haven't conferred on urban policy, but both are singing the same tune. In his new song, "Move From the 'Hood," Allison wails:

*I know some of you are doin' your best;
You want a good job, not a welfare check.
But you gotta move;
You gotta move from the 'hood.*

As politicians and policy analysts revisited the thorny problems of urban poverty in recent years, they seemed to be arriving at a rare consensus: Poor people are hurt by their concentration in large, inner-city neighborhoods that further social isolation and racial segregation. In this view, it would be better to disperse poor people and minorities, putting them in closer proximity to jobs, decent suburban schools, and safe communities. This idea of helping individuals, rather than funneling aid to localities, came to be known as helping "people, not places."

In principle, this approach enjoyed bipartisan support. As an instrument of integration and community renewal, it entailed a far lower scale of "social engineering" than massive school busing or subsidized housing construction. It relied more heavily on private market forces, by inviting the poor to use housing vouchers to move to better market-rate housing, or to commute to suburban jobs. It was exactly the blend of conservative means and liberal goals that appealed to, say, a Republican like Jack Kemp or a Democrat like Bill Clinton. It seemed well suited to a moment when the goals of social policy became incremental rather than grandiose.

But lately, this sort of benign alternative has been swamped by the tides of extreme conservatism—the strictures on public spending, the

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attack on government regulation, and the sidelining of the deferred agenda of racial justice. In Congress, the deconcentration strategy is the victim both of Republican budget-cutting and the resistance by many politicians, including some Democrats, even to token measures to encourage integration of the suburbs. And in suburbia itself, deeply entrenched racial practices lead to stubborn resistance against even moderate integration, and to resegregation when black migration occurs.

Today, residential segregation remains at the heart of the American dilemma. Poverty alone does not explain why blacks (and to a lesser extent, Latinos) live in ghettos and barrios. Studies show that while many of the white poor live in mixed-income areas (including suburbs), the black poor are much more highly concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods. Discrimination by lenders, landlords, and real estate brokers accounts for much of this "hyper-segregation." Overall, about two-thirds of African Americans live in segregated areas—a figure that has scarcely changed in three decades. Deconcentration may seem a gentler, more market-like remedy than earlier forms of social engineering, but the resistance to it suggests just how deeply segregation is still entrenched.

GAUTREAUX'S CHILDREN

The strategy of giving the minority poor more choice in where they live can be traced in part to the relative success of a plan in Chicago that grew out of a 1966 lawsuit. Attorney Alexander Polikoff and residents of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)—led by Dorothy Gautreaux—charged that the CHA reinforced segregation by locating nearly all public housing in overwhelmingly African American neighborhoods. In upholding their claim, Judge Richard Austin ordered the CHA to build low-rise scattered-site housing throughout Chicago. The CHA strenuously resisted and little new housing was built.

In response to this resistance, the plaintiffs successfully sued to force HUD and the CHA to fund a rent-subsidy voucher program throughout the six-county Chicago area. The court appointed a non-profit, open housing advocate—the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities—to manage the program. Since then, with the aid of the Gautreaux mobility program, about 5,700 CHA families have moved to largely white neighborhoods with relatively few poor people, primarily in the suburbs.

Eligible CHA families scramble to get their names on a selection list each year. The Leadership Council screens the candidates to eliminate those who lack the credit history, housekeeping skills, and other attributes that make them likely to succeed in finding a suburban apartment. They are then counseled on how to search for a rental unit, even how to impress a potential new landlord, but they then conduct the hunt for a suitable apartment on their own. (In the early years the Leadership Council helped them find apartments.)

Although the Gautreaux plans were originally remedies for racial segregation, housing mobility also emerged as a potential weapon against poverty. Northwestern University sociologist James Rosenbaum and his colleagues found that the children of CHA families who moved to the suburbs—and to some extent the parents themselves—fared better than those who moved out of public housing but remained in the city. While 63.8 percent of suburban movers had a job after moving, only 50.9 percent of city movers did. The jobs found by city and suburban movers paid about the same hourly wages—in both cases about 20 percent higher than their previous jobs. Though the children of suburban movers often had school troubles at first, eventually they were more likely to stay in school and to attend college or land full-time, better-paying jobs than those in the city. The new black suburbanites also reported that they felt safer and that their children were more likely to interact socially with white kids than if they had stayed in the ghetto.

OUTWARD HO

The results from the relatively small-scale Gautreaux mobility plan have led enthusiasts, including the editorial writers of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, to compare the migration of urban poor to the suburbs to the westward march of pioneers or even the underground railroad from slavery.

This somewhat exaggerated enthusiasm reflects in part a disillusionment with conventional federal efforts to rebuild the inner city, a view articulated by journalist Nicholas Lemann in the *New York Times Magazine* last year. Lemann's piece contended that much of the money was wasted because these communities were economically and socially doomed. Urban renewal, Model Cities, Urban Development Action Grants, revenue sharing, the Community Reinvestment Act and the new federal

empowerment zones all attempted to use public investment to lure private capital into central cities. Despite some successes, it is clear that other forces—including capital flight, technological change, racial discrimination, and the much greater federal subsidies to the suburbs through highways and mortgage deductions—have overwhelmed most of the public urban initiatives of the past three decades. Of course, people-centered policies, such as welfare payments or job training, have lost political support as well.

A key instrument of the geographic dispersal strategy is housing vouchers, which have been part of federal housing policy for two decades. In 1974 the federal government began shifting the emphasis away from subsidizing construction of low-income housing complexes. Instead, the government offered vouchers to allow poor people to rent apartments on the private market. Families who receive a housing certificate, under Section 8 of the Housing and Community Development Act, pay 30 percent of their income and HUD picks up the rest, up to a “fair market rent” ceiling. (Congressional Republicans recently proposed raising the tenant share to 32 percent and lowering the fair market rent, thus reducing the choice of housing available, especially in middle-income suburbs.) There are currently about 1.4 million households with Section 8 vouchers. These subsidies cost about \$7 billion annually.

Though some inner-city black poor over the years used these certificates to move to the suburbs, such migration alone has not guaranteed new or better opportunities. Black suburbanites often end up living in resegregated communities that can’t provide adequate education or other public services and may still be far from potential jobs. For example, in Chicago, more than 91 percent of Section 8 families are black. According to research by Paul Fischer of Lake Forest College, more than half of the families live in seven suburban communities, six of them in nearby south suburbs that are largely black and increasingly stressed economically. Ironically, Polikoff may now sue to break up these new suburban Section 8 ghettos. So Gautreaux-like programs are often necessary if Section 8 is to work effectively as a dispersal strategy.

ENTER CLINTON

The Clinton administration, albeit minimally, has promoted policies that target both places and

people. Its place-oriented urban policies (empowerment zones, tougher regulations against bank redlining, encouragement of community development banks, and federal aid to hire police), have met fierce Republican opposition. Under the influence of sociologists William Julius Wilson of the University of Chicago and Douglas Massey of the University of Pennsylvania, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros became an enthusiastic supporter of the strategy of breaking up inner-city high concentrations of poor minorities, to pursue racial justice, fight poverty, and improve urban life. Toward that goal, the Clinton administration has partly shifted in the direction of “people, not places.” It has selectively given local housing authorities the right to tear down central city projects. It has also proposed privatizing federally subsidized housing developments and giving current residents Section 8 vouchers to help them afford apartments in the private market. In addition, the administration hopes to expand successful “reverse commuting” pilot programs in Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Chicago that help inner-city residents get to suburban jobs, and bring income back into poverty neighborhoods.

Inspired by Chicago’s Gautreaux experience, congressional Democrats in 1992 inserted into HUD’s budget a new pilot program to encourage inner-city public housing residents to move to the suburbs, called “Moving To Opportunity” (MTO). Although it was strongly embraced by Bush’s HUD Secretary, Jack Kemp, Cisneros implemented MTO and became its champion. The MTO initiative provides \$164 million to five cities—Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles won the grant competition—to work with local non-profit groups to implement small-scale, metropolitan-wide “housing mobility” programs. HUD also is funding research to see how the 1,305 families who moved fare compared to those who remain in the projects. Smaller Gautreaux-like programs already operate in Cincinnati, Memphis, Dallas, Milwaukee, and Hartford.

On the surface, with its reliance on markets and choice, MTO should appeal to Republicans, as it did to Kemp and others at the end of Bush’s administration. But congressional Republicans are now largely hostile to any housing and urban aid and see MTO as a Democratic program that can be race baited. MTO

and Gautreaux can be seen as reducing inefficiencies, prejudices, and consumer ignorance to make housing markets more fair, effective, and efficient. But conservatives in Congress and in the pages of right-wing publications like *National Review* and *American Spectator* have attacked MTO as a new version of school busing, assailing the hardly new or radical idea of mixed-income communities as denying middle- or upper-middle-class residents the right to choose to live in an exclusive community. Clearly, race as much as income motivated the attack.

In Baltimore, Louis De Pazzo, a conservative Democratic candidate for County Council in the hard-pressed blue-collar and white areas of eastern Baltimore county, seized on MTO as an issue in early 1994. His opponent was the president of the non-profit group selected to help Baltimore's public housing agency implement MTO. DePazzo encouraged opponents to organize protests; some Republican candidates joined the chorus; and near-panic swept some white neighborhoods. Already anxious about the loss of industrial jobs and decaying public infrastructure and services, they thought Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke's call for razing some public housing projects meant that MTO would lead to a flood of poor blacks into their communities. Ironically, no MTO participants would have gone to many of these neighborhoods because the neighborhoods didn't meet program requirements. (Their poverty rates already exceeded 10 percent.) In any case, MTO provided enough money to move only 285 families, many of whom would probably stay in Baltimore or disperse to more affluent suburbs.

But with one exception, no prominent Maryland politician defended MTO. In the midst of the controversy, Maryland Democratic Senator Barbara Mikulski, a liberal populist, killed the planned expansion of MTO in her role as chair of the subcommittee overseeing HUD. Ironically, within a few months of the election, the controversy had died down, the plan was being implemented smoothly, and several of the politicians opposed to MTO were in deep political trouble on other issues.

When the MTO extension was killed, most of the money was redirected into a broader, less focused housing mobility program, "Choice In Residency." Under this HUD plan, nonprofit agencies in selected cities will provide counseling on housing choices to any Section 8 voucher recipient who wants it. But it will not require recipients to move out of the central city or poverty areas. Nor

will it provide HUD with funds to evaluate whether the counseling program helps participants find better housing or jobs. Though the plan is still going forward, Republican-mandated cutbacks in the Section 8 program, increasing the tenant share of rent payments and limiting the total rent that can be paid, will limit the plan's effectiveness by making middle-income communities more out of reach.

The success of the Clinton administration's plan to help the poor move out of urban concentrations depends on overcoming suburban resistance and assuring that there is adequate affordable rental housing in the suburbs. Both premises are now in doubt. Housing shortages limit the scale of any residential mobility strategy. Fewer than 30 percent of the nation's 13 million low-income renter families eligible for vouchers or subsidized housing receive any aid. In many cities, both regular Section 8 and special vouchers under Gautreaux-like programs go unused because renters can't find suitable housing outside the ghettos. The result is like giving people food stamps when grocery shelves are empty. Construction of affordable rental housing plummeted under the Reagan and Bush administrations as subsidies were cut. Developers have even found it difficult to build market-rate rental apartments, partly because suburbs have increasingly imposed "snob zoning" restrictions that effectively keep out multifamily residences and, hence, low-income people.

Some housing and civil rights advocates argue that the federal government should work to eliminate exclusionary zoning by conditioning federal funds for localities on strategies to encourage a mix of housing. Massachusetts, California, and New Jersey have enacted laws against "snob zoning" that enable developers of low-income housing to override local zoning restrictions. The Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has gone even further. State Representative Myron Orfield, acting on behalf of the communities in the metro area, sponsored legislation to create an elected metropolitan council with the authority to establish "fair share" housing goals for each municipality. This legislation gave the council the power to withhold sewer, highway, infrastructure, and other state funds from communities that refuse to comply. Orfield's legislative package also included a tax-base sharing plan to reduce property tax disparities among municipalities in the region, so that inner-ring suburbs and the two major cities had a stake

in regional cooperation plans.

A more proactive HUD could provide incentives to make Section 8 a metropolitan-wide program run by regional agencies rather than local housing authorities.

A few black politicians and community leaders in Chicago have criticized efforts to break up the concentration of black poor as a landgrab by white politicians and real estate interests. Others see suburban mobility programs as diluting black political power. Critics also say these initiatives skim the most motivated and talented of the poor out of the city, although initially what most distinguishes MTO applicants from their neighbors remaining in public housing appears to be concern about crime. Clearly politicians have their own agendas that contribute to cynicism: With Clinton administration aid, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley has begun tearing down projects near the site of the 1996 Democratic Convention and building a less dense, more mixed-income project.

However, many black leaders—even those who want to encourage blacks to stay in the city—also favor the creation of more mixed-income communities, even within public housing projects. Deconcentration of the poor has widespread support in principle, but there is far less agreement about where the poor should go. There are also no clear answers about where they will find jobs, wherever they end up living. Even the limited number of Gautreaux participants made only marginal employment gains by moving to the suburbs; the biggest beneficiaries were their children. Blacks continue to face dwindling job opportunities and lingering employment discrimination, as several recent studies document. A move to the suburbs will not quickly eliminate their problems in finding jobs.

HALF FULL, HALF EMPTY

The saga of the Gautreaux program and its progeny suggests that while dispersal strategies have a place, they are no panacea. If there is no disposition among white voters to pump massive resources into cities, neither is there a welcome wagon for a mass minority exodus to suburbia. Moreover, whatever its merits, the residential strategy accepts the trend toward ever-expanding suburbanization, a trend that poses serious problems for economic efficiency, environmental protection,

and the livability of cities.

Since this sprawl is partly driven by flight from the problems of the cities, it may be more productive to encourage greater city-suburban cooperation within metropolitan areas to revive central cities rather than counting on the poor finding their place in the flight from the center. Some suburban voters, perhaps, can be wooed on the basis of conscience (helping the disadvantaged) or fear (that urban problems will “spill over” to suburbs). A more productive approach is to recognize the common ground between cities and suburbs. In particular, older, inner-ring working-class suburbs now face many of the same problems, ranging from traffic gridlock to unequal distribution of resources. The common problem is that affluent suburbs contribute too little to the common metropolitan tax base, get more than their share of public amenities, and exclude nearly all of the poor. Several recent studies show that cities and suburbs rise and fall together.

Even where deconcentration strategies enjoy modest success, the danger is that politicians may see housing mobility programs as a cheap, easy alternative to either the financial support and counseling that new suburban residents need, or to strategies to help the vast majority of the poor who remain in the central city. Even worse, “deconcentration” without a strategy to create affordable housing outside the ghetto may be simply a way of driving the poor away, to someone else’s backyard.

Kale Williams, former director of the Leadership Council that carried out the Gautreaux program, says that the program has achieved partial success because “it hasn’t been large enough to threaten anyone and hasn’t been concentrated enough to arouse apprehension.” When Mayor Daley and the former chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority Vince Lane proposed razing many CHA projects and dispersing residents, there was a flurry of suburban mayoral opposition. That subsided when it became clear that budgetary constraints would limit the dispersal program to token numbers.

Dispersal programs can help end the de facto “apartheid” that urban blacks continue to experience despite three decades of civil rights laws. It is sad, however, that this approach seems to be acceptable to white society only when it is limited and small-scale. In the end, residential mobility plans are only a small part of the unfinished business of reviving old inner cities and integrating America.□

DOES LIBERALISM CAUSE SEX?

BY JANE MAULDON AND KRISTIN LUKER

The drumbeat of criticism that eventually drove Joycelyn Elders out of office as Surgeon General may be only a fading memory, but the controversies over sex education and contraception that dogged her tenure linger on. To conservatives, nothing symbolizes the illusions of liberalism better than the failure of permissive sexual policies. In the years since contraceptives became widely available and schools began offering sex education, haven't kids become more promiscuous? Aren't births to unmarried teenage mothers soaring? Therefore, conservatives say, the government ought to practice some abstinence of its own and stop sex education in our schools and programs that promote contraception.

But, like so many conservative arguments that appeal to a general sense of social decline, this one ignores some well-established facts. More teenagers use

contraception, they use it sooner after starting sex, and they are becoming more sophisticated about its use. Pregnancy rates among sexually active teenagers have dropped, decreasing by 20 percent between 1970 and 1990. Recent evidence also suggests that sex and AIDS education programs in the public schools have encouraged youth to delay sex, limit the number of partners, and use condoms.

But, conservatives say, increased access to contraceptives and sex education has stimulated more sexual activity among teenagers. These fears were cogently voiced in 1978 by Archbishop (now Cardinal) Bernardin, who doubted, he said, whether "more and better contraceptive information and services will make major inroads in the number of teenage pregnancies—it will motivate them to precocious sexual activity but by no means to the practice of contraception. In which case the solution will merely have made the problem worse."

Was the Archbishop right? For if he was, Americans might have reason to shut down the great enterprise of sexual enlightenment that America launched thirty years ago.

AN AMERICAN TRANSFORMATION

Turning the clock back on policies toward contraception and sex education would return us to a radically different age. Until 30 years ago, it was the policy of the U.S. government to keep contraceptives out of the hands of the poor, the unmarried, and the young. Even information about contraceptives was hard to obtain because of the legacy of the Comstock Act of 1873, which defined contraceptives as "obscene." As late as 1964 contraception was nominally illegal in some states even for married people. Public contraceptive programs, condoms in plain view in grocery stores, and magazine advertisements for contraceptive products were unimaginable. Sex education for many students before the 1960s consisted of a brief lecture about menstrual hygiene (delivered to girls by the school nurse) or nocturnal emissions (delivered to boys by the coach). Where condoms were legal, they were typically available only behind the counter in pharmacies, which often refused to sell them to customers the pharmacist knew or suspected weren't married. Doctors and clinics also often turned the young away unless

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they could show proof of parental consent.

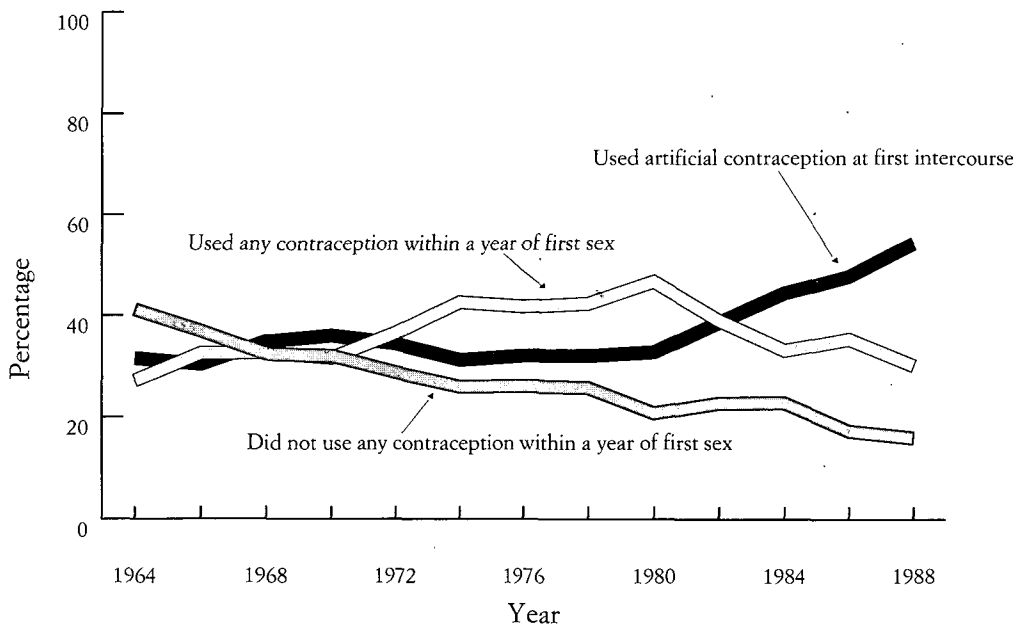
Then, in a remarkably short time, the Supreme Court made contraception legal, and the president and Congress helped to make it accessible. In 1964 the Court ruled in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that states could not ban the use of contraceptives. In the War on Poverty that began the same year, providing contraceptives to poor women became a high priority. Prior to *Griswold*, only women who could afford a private physician had been able to acquire birth control because the Comstock Act had been interpreted as prohibiting, in most circumstances, public expenditures on contraception. Under antipoverty programs, the first recipients of contraceptives were poor married women, but soon teenagers were also included. In 1966 Congress mandated that birth control be offered to any woman over 15 years of age on public assistance, married or not. In 1967 the federal government reserved 6 percent of maternal and child health funds for family planning for poor women, and in 1972 it stipulated that state welfare programs offer contraceptives to "minors who can be considered sexually active." By the mid-1970s, public contraceptive clinics were the first choice of a majority of teenagers and were especially likely to

be used by teenagers from poor families and by minority teens. Contraceptives became available through a wide network of public health services, hospitals, clinics, and Planned Parenthood centers—all this, despite the absence of a national health care system.

Although ready access to contraceptives is now part of the fabric of American life, conservatives hold it partly responsible for what they see as deepening moral decline. Among the sources of misperception about the consequences of liberalized contraceptive access is a series of misunderstandings about teenage pregnancy and the use of birth control. Constant references to "an epidemic of teenage pregnancy" suggest that the pregnancy rate for teens is dramatically higher than in the past and different from pregnancy rates among older women. In fact, the overall teenage pregnancy rate rose modestly between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, from 95 to 107 pregnancies annually per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19; it rose a little more rapidly from 1987 to 1991, and then fell in 1992 and 1993 (the last year for which we have data). Changes in the rate for teenagers closely track the somewhat higher pregnancy rates among women aged 20 to 29.

TIMELINESS OF TEENAGE CONTRACEPTION

Timing of contraception among sexually active unmarried teens



It is natural to assume that a higher teen pregnancy rate means that sexually active young women are more likely to conceive than they used to be, but this assumption is false. For most of the last two decades the pregnancy rate rose because more teenagers were sexually active, not because more sexually active teens were becoming pregnant. As more teens started to have sex while unmarried, they also became much more likely to use condoms, the pill, and other forms of birth control. "Timeliness of Teenage Contraception" (see previous page) tells the story. It divides women who became sexually active as teenagers into three groups: those who used an effective form of contraception at first intercourse; those who used any form of contraception (including withdrawal and rhythm) in the first year after having sex; and those who did not use any kind of birth control methods within a year of starting sex (or, in many cases, ever). In 1964 only one-third of sexually active 15- to 19-year-olds used protection during their first sexual experiences, while 40 percent did nothing to prevent pregnancy for at least a year after their first sexual intercourse. But by 1988, 56 percent of sexually active teens used contraception from the start, and fewer than 16 percent were delaying con-

traception by more than a year. The unsurprising result is that a smaller fraction of the sexually active teens became pregnant with every year that passed between 1972 and 1990.

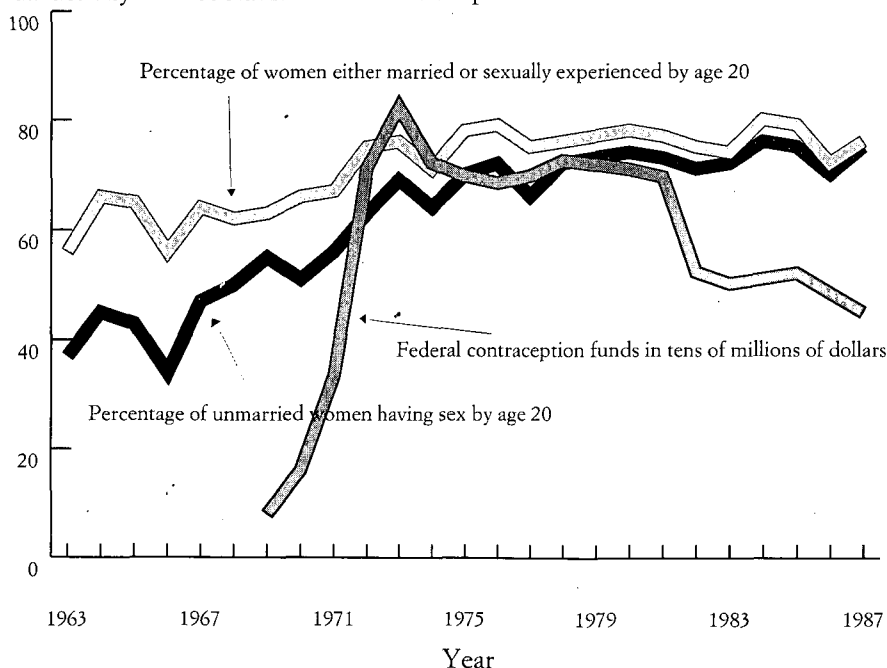
PERVERSE EFFECTS?

But what about Archbishop Bernardin's thesis that offering contraception to teenagers increases the odds that they will become sexually active and, more precisely, that they will be sexually active without using contraception? Based on the historical record in the United States and other developed nations, no one has yet been able to show that liberalized contraceptive policies increase teenage sexual activity in general or unprotected sex in particular.

Looking overseas first, we find that almost all European nations report increases similar to ours in sexual activity among teens, although they have followed widely divergent policies on access to birth control. Some have long offered publicly funded birth control to women of all ages as part of their national health care systems. Others make it difficult for even adult women to acquire contraception. These varied national strategies make up a kind of natural experiment. The evidence shows that sexual activity among teenagers is independent of any

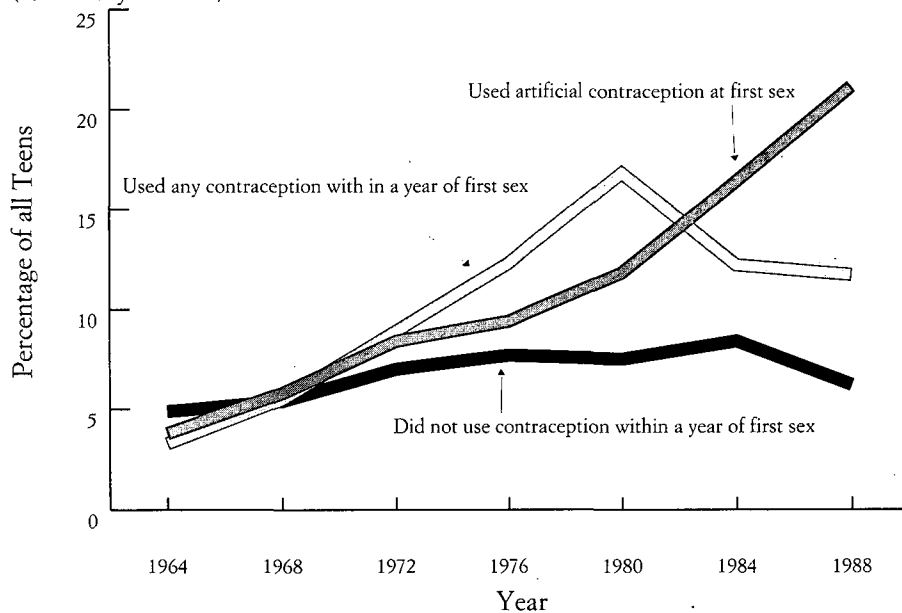
SEX BEFORE SUBSIDIES

Teenage sexual activity and federal funds for contraception



UNPROTECTED TEEN SEX RISES, THEN DECLINES

Timing of contraception by unmarried sexually active teens, relative to all female teens (15 to 19 years old)



changes in the public provision of contraceptives.

In the United States the policy changes of the 1960s and 1970s responded to social changes already under way. Young people were delaying marriage but not forgoing sex. In the early 1950s American women had a one-in-two chance of being married by the age of twenty. After 1960 the median age at marriage rose four years, lengthening by about 50 percent the time that sexually mature young women (and men) are single. Norms about sex and marriage changed, and the rate of sex outside of marriage increased accordingly. As "Sex Before Subsidies" shows (see previous page), the proportion of American adolescents who were sexually active and unmarried was growing steadily before any public subsidy for birth control. Not only was teen sex already on the increase, but sexual activity leveled off as funding became relatively generous in the 1970s.

Thus the first part of Archbishop Bernardin's hypothesis—providing contraception increases sexual activity—is unsupported by the available data. His second claim, that as more teens become sexually active more of them engage in unprotected sex, was somewhat true during the 1970s but not during the 1980s (when our data end).

"Unprotected Teen Sex Rises, Then Declines"

(see above), shows the trends between 1964 and 1988 in the sexual behavior of all young women aged 15 to 19. The proportion of all teens who were sexually active and who waited some months to use contraception did indeed grow between 1964 and 1980, but their numbers fell during the 1980s. In contrast, the proportion using contraceptives at first intercourse increased rapidly and continuously over the entire period. And the number of hard-core non-contraceptors—those who were having sex but waited at least a year to use a method—did not increase at all between 1964 and 1980, remaining at around only 5 percent of all teens.

In short, as more young unmarried women have become sexually involved, they have also become more likely to use contraception. And while unmarried virgins are less numerous among teens than they used to be, they still remain in the majority. It is married teens who have almost vanished from the landscape.

These data, however, cut two ways. While public funding of contraception has not caused more teens to have sex, neither is there any clear correlation between public funds and teenage use of contraceptives. When federal funds were cut in the 1980s, overall teenage contraceptive use did not decline too, although these broad national data

may not pick up the difference public funding makes in low-income and minority communities. Clearly, other factors affect the use of contraceptives: the determination of many teens to avoid pregnancy; increased commercial access to contraceptives in large anonymous drugstores and supermarkets, and the dissemination of knowledge about birth control—including sex education programs in schools and throughout the community that conservatives have also attacked.

THE EFFICACY OF SEX EDUCATION

Critics claim that sex education has failed primarily on the basis of research that has shown no appreciable difference in behavior between students who have taken sex education courses and those who have not. But only in recent years have most schools offered education about birth control to young teens, timed to occur before most of them are sexually active.

For many young people, sex education has come from a partner, not from a class. In the 1988 National Survey of Family Growth—the most recent, large-scale survey available—almost half of all young women (44 percent) born between 1963 and 1965 had sex education about contraception after they had become sexually active. But as schools became willing to teach sex education in lower grades, this pattern began to change. Of teens born between 1966 and 1968, 38 percent had sex before sex education, but of those born between 1971 and 1972, only 19 percent had been sexually active prior to any instruction about contraception.

Most types of sex education offered after sexual initiation have little effect on behavior. Yet the popular view that sex education does not work was based on early studies that did not distinguish youngsters who received sex education from those who sat through the instruction when they were already having sex. Any beneficial effects of sex education on the students who were still virgins were likely masked by the absence of effects among the sexually active.

Our own analyses of the 1988 survey data show a strong relationship between prior sex education and contraceptive use by teens. We found a difference of about 10 percentage points in the likelihood of contraceptive use. By 1988 young women who had had sex education were only half as likely as those who had not to delay contraception for a year or more.

The impact of sex education stems from small changes among many students. It can hasten their use of birth control, encourage more effective methods, and (though this is not our theme here) help students to resist premature or unwanted sexual activities. In short, it will nudge some students—not all—in the direction of safer behavior.

Some, of course, do not need to be nudged in school. Half of sexually active teens in the 1980s used some type of contraception at first sex even without formal sex education. Others cannot be reached even through a good program. About 3 percent of students who had had sex education had never used contraceptives even though they had been sexually active for more than a year. But between these extremes lie half of sexually active youth, whose behavior can be shaped by the information, skills, peer expectations, and adult counsel that constitute an effective sex education curriculum.

DESIGNING SEX EDUCATION PROGRAMS

While these graphs suggest that sex education can work, aggregate data tell us nothing about what goes into an effective program. Fortunately, thanks to a panel of 14 national experts convened at the request of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and a recent analysis for the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), we know more than ever before on this question. Under the leadership of Douglas Kirby of ETR Associates, the panel carefully reviewed the evaluations of 16 school-based programs and 7 studies using national data with an eye to establishing what works. Kirby subsequently reviewed an additional 33 studies for the OTA.

Both reviews first address the Bernardin hypothesis that sex education increases sexual activity among teens. None of the evaluated curricula hastened sexual intercourse or increased its frequency among participating students. Kirby and colleagues are unequivocal: "These data strongly support the conclusion that sexuality and AIDS education cur-

Sexual activity among teenagers is independent of changes in the public provision of contraceptives.

riculums that include discussions of contraception in combination with other topics—such as resistance [to sexual pressure] skills—do not hasten the onset of intercourse.” In fact, even those sex education programs associated with school-based clinics, which provide birth control to students, did not find that rates of sexual initiation went up.

Indeed, the news is that sometimes sex education can postpone sexual initiation if the program is based on carefully evaluated strategies and is offered to groups of students who are mostly still virgins. Kirby and colleagues note that “two curriculums that specified delaying the onset of intercourse as a clear goal . . . successfully reduced the proportion of sexually inexperienced students who initiated sex during the following 12 to 18 months. Notably, both groups also received instruction on contraception.” This result may not have been found in earlier research into sex education because until recently, most curricula did not explicitly seek to discourage students from initiating sex at young ages.

Other programs that successfully influenced student behavior were focused on increasing contraceptive use or, more specifically, increasing condom use, among participating students. These programs had several features in common. They had clear goals and a relatively narrow focus, whether on postponing sexual involvement or on reducing risks of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. They acknowledged the importance of peer group behavior in student learning. They offered accurate information through experiential exercises designed to let students personalize the information. And they let students practice skills in sexual communication, negotiation, and refusal.

In part because of their controversial character, the early sex education curricula that addressed contraception were often forced to adopt a tone of value neutrality, focusing on clinical information to the exclusion of the social, emotional, and moral aspects of sex. The research by Kirby and his colleagues suggests that this strategy was a mistake. In many respects, the most successful sex education programs are liberal in the breadth of their discussion but conservative in their directive message.

The Europeans reached this conclusion first. They have carved out a middle ground between absolute prohibition of adolescent sexuality and the total abdication of any adult responsibilities for guiding it. The new sex education programs in the United States are trying to create an analogous

middle ground. Feminists and conservatives alike can find something to admire in programs that encourage young women (and men) to resist peer pressure and take responsibility when and if they feel truly ready for sexual intimacy. While the far right will still insist on a policy of “just say no” and sexual libertarians will resent any attempt to tell adolescents what to do, the emerging consensus of the middle has much to recommend it.

The CDC’s team of reviewers emphasizes that we are just beginning to understand which factors contribute most to the overall success of the programs. Their main message is that some programs do work and that the next generation of programs should take advantage of the lessons that varied approaches teach.

American youngsters in the 1990s face a different world from the one that confronted their parents. More young people are sexually active, and more report that some sexual activity is coerced. Sexually transmitted diseases that threaten health and fertility (gonorrhea and chlamydia) or life itself (AIDS) afflict many young as well as older people. Helping teens handle these challenges isn’t easy. Their needs change rapidly as they mature: A youngster may need encouragement to postpone sexual involvement when she or he is fifteen, easy access to contraceptives when he or she is eighteen, and, throughout, increasingly sophisticated help in sexual negotiation and refusal.

America has a long way to go before our teenagers are as effective in preventing pregnancy as are most of their European counterparts. While we understand the desire of many people to turn the clock back to a simpler age, the crucial task now is to continue studying open-mindedly what works for adolescents, and for whom it works. It is simplistic, and mistaken, to claim that the efforts of the past two decades to help teens have been either ineffective or counterproductive. Young people from across the social spectrum have taken advantage of public policies to help them take care of themselves. Legally imposed barriers that once imperiled their well-being have been lowered or removed. That these new policies and programs have made only slow and partial progress is evidence for strengthening them and designing them more intelligently. To abandon the effort now would be a kind of collective, parental irresponsibility.□

DEAN BAKER

The Inflated Case Against the CPI

There is now the appearance of an expert consensus that the government's most important measure of inflation, the consumer price index (CPI), seriously overstates the true increase in the cost of living. This sudden enlightenment is less the result of new research than political convenience. A cut in the CPI would reduce government payouts and ease the path to deficit reduction. Even better, it would do so via a technical adjustment that left few political fingerprints.

Tax brackets and government benefit programs such as Social Security are indexed to the CPI. If the CPI overstates inflation by 1 percent, as the Senate Finance Committee's Boskin panel has proposed, and the index is adjusted accordingly, this would reduce benefits and the deficit by a cumulative total of \$634 billion over 10 years. Not bad for a technical fix.

Doubtless, the way we measure inflation requires continuous refinement. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) takes this task seriously, and has made myriad small adjustments over the past three decades. For years, there was a nuanced and relatively obscure debate about how to fine-tune the CPI. Lately, there has been a politically driven fren-

zy, as a small group of economists has labored to uncover—and exaggerate—all the ways in which the CPI might overstate inflation. Many claims have been advanced based on very little real evidence. There has also been virtually no effort to examine the ways in which the CPI might understate inflation.

The immediate protagonists are the five-member panel appointed by the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by former Bush economic advisor Michael Boskin, to make recommendations on revisions in the CPI. Though the group includes some eminent economists, all had previously testified on the CPI's supposed bias. All were chosen as known quantities who could be reliably counted upon to recommend a downward revision. Other eminent economists such as former BLS Commissioner Janet Norwood, who took the opposite view, were ignored. The panel was appointed in June 1995 and announced its 1 percent solution in mid-September. It conducted no original research. Instead, it used rough rules of thumb to reach its conclusions.

THE CASE FOR SHRINKING THE CPI

Five factors are usually cited by those claiming an upward bias

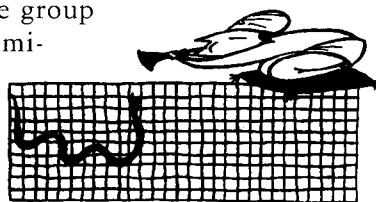
in the CPI. Each provides some basis for claiming the index overstates inflation. However, the size of any resulting overstatement is far smaller than what is being claimed, and may well be offset by the sources of understatement in the CPI.

Substitution Effects. This is the most frequently cited source of bias, perhaps because so many reporters learned about it in their introductory economics classes. Most goods have close substitutes. If oranges are \$1.99 a pound, consumers switch to

apples. The CPI measures the prices of a fixed basket of goods and services. When the price of some goods in this basket rises temporarily, thrifty

consumers shift to substitutes. By holding the basket fixed, the CPI then overstates the true increase in the cost of living for most consumers. This is a fair criticism.

However, most studies that have tried to measure the size of this bias find it to be very small, between 0.1 percent and 0.2 percent annually. (The Boskin panel scored it as 0.3 percent.) Moreover, one might fairly argue that even a close substitution "choice" dictated by a price rise entails an offsetting loss to quality. Presuming the substitute to be identical is like comparing, well, apples and oranges.



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The Wal-Mart Effect. Over the last several decades discount stores have displaced many traditional retailers. As a result, consumers purchase many goods at far lower prices. The CPI does base its local samples on where consumers actually shop, but the CPI does not record the switch from a traditional department store to a discount store as a price decline. Rather, the price differential is treated as offsetting the lower quality of service in the discount store. Clearly this treatment misses a cost saving. Since discount stores have grown rapidly at the expense of traditional retailers, many consumers must consider the cheaper price well worth the lower quality service.

However, the importance of this difference for the CPI has been vastly overstated. Only about 15 percent of the index consists of goods that could potentially be sold in discount stores (primarily apparel, appliances, and household furniture). The share of consumers who patronize discounters versus full-price retailers simply does not change much from year to year. Moreover, even if the true price difference is as much as 10 percent (after adjusting for differences in service quality), this would lead to a bias of just 0.015 percent a year. This compares to a figure of 0.2 percent to 0.4 percent often cited by those claiming a substantial CPI overstatement of inflation. The Boskin panel used a figure of 0.2 percent.

Quality Bias. One of the largest sources of alleged overstatement of inflation is the failure of the consumer price index

to fully account for the improvements in product quality. Clearly, a \$2,000 computer today is a far superior machine to a \$2,000 computer bought as recently as 1994. Most products are continuously improving in quality. But in fact, the consumer price index already includes extensive adjustments for product quality. It may even overstate the improvement in quality in some cases.

For example, the price index for new cars has increased approximately 150 percent from 1970 to the present, although the average price of an actual new car has increased about fourfold. Based on the CPI's price adjustment, it should be possible to purchase a car today for approximately 2.5 times what a comparable car cost in 1970. In 1970, a new Volkswagen Beetle cost about \$2,000. But no new car is on the market today for anything close to \$5,000, as would be implied by the new car index. The bottom-of-the-line new car available today for \$9,000 is doubtless a significantly better car than a Volkswagen Beetle, but there are probably many consumers who would prefer to purchase a new Beetle at \$5,000 rather than pay more for a better car.

This is the general problem with the quality adjustments in the index. Price increases attributed to quality adjustments are not counted as price increases in the index, even though many consumers might not pay for them if they had the choice.

There are also many areas where quality has plainly deteriorated. For example, many consumers have to spend more time fighting with health insurance

companies over the processing of claims than 20 years ago, but this deterioration is not picked up in the index. Airline service has declined—less legroom, more changes of planes and missed connections, fewer meals, more convoluted fares. Other examples include longer waits in traffic and time spent waiting on hold or navigating voicemail instructions. None of these quality deteriorations are recorded in the CPI. Given the very limited research on quality adjustments in the CPI (the most frequently cited work is now twelve years out of date), it is impossible to reach any conclusive judgment about the size, or direction, of quality bias in the present index.

New Products. New goods are typically not included in the index until several years after they first appear on the market. During this time, they often undergo large price reductions—which are not picked up in the index. The inclusion of these price declines would lead to a lower measure of inflation. The classic example of this problem is the hand calculator. When it first appeared on the market it cost over \$1,000. Within a couple of years its price had fallen to under \$100. This huge decline in price was not picked up in the CPI.

But wait. Most people don't buy very expensive new products. Such products only find mass markets after their price has come down dramatically. (How many people bought thousand-dollar hand calculators?)

The CPI is an "expenditure-weighted index," meaning that each dollar of consumer expen-

diture is weighted equally. This means that if Donald Trump spends 1,000 times what the average consumer spends, his expenditures count 1,000 times as much as those of the average consumer. Of course, it is the Donald Trumps who buy the expensive new products.

However, it is possible to construct the index in a different way, which would count each consumer's expenditures equally. Under this system 1 percent of my budget would count the same as 1 percent of Donald Trump's budget in determining the weighting of a particular item. Such an approach is clearly more appropriate for the purposes the CPI is intended for. There is no reason that Social Security recipients should get a smaller cost of living adjustment because a few wealthy people experience huge savings on hand calculators. Nor does it make sense that such a bonanza for the wealthy should affect wage contracts that use the CPI as a point of reference.

A "person-weighted" index that counted each individual's expenditures equally would provide a much better gauge of the increase in the cost of living experienced by most of the population—and it would virtually eliminate the problem of new goods as a source of bias in the index. Here is a case crying out for a genuine technical adjustment, but one that cuts in the opposite direction from the Boskin panel.

Formula Bias. This is the most technical issue (sorry). Suppose the price of a good rises from \$1.00 to \$1.10. This is a 10 percent increase in price. Suppose it then falls back from

\$1.10 to \$1.00; this is a 9 percent decrease in price. If these changes were just added together it would imply a 1 percent increase in price even though the price had not changed at all. BLS was never so foolish as to construct the CPI in such a way that it would be generally subject to this bias. But there are other such technical problems. BLS has researched this issue extensively, and uncovered and corrected several such areas. It is possible that problems of this sort may still exist in places, but the impact is likely to be extremely small, almost certainly less than 0.1 percent annually.

Let's give the critics the benefit of the doubt. Adding all of these possible biases together, a plausible estimate of inflation overstatement in the CPI would be 0.4 percent—not the one full percentage point estimated by the Boskin panel. But this is a gross adjustment, not a net one: It revises only those elements of the CPI that apparently overstate inflation. To be accurate, one needs to offset this adjustment with factors that suggest the CPI may be too low.

A DOWNWARD BIAS?

The possibility that the CPI understates inflation has received little attention, since it won't help cut the deficit. Indeed, if the CPI errs on the low side, then Social Security pensioners should be getting bigger checks. Consider three distinct sources of downward bias:

Health Insurance Costs. The CPI does not include most increases in insurance premiums for individual health insurance, or increases in copayments or

deductibles on employer-purchased insurance. This has been a major drain on household budgets in recent years, as employers have shifted more of the cost of health insurance back to their employees. Nor does the CPI include increases in required payments by beneficiaries of government programs such as the proposed increases in the Medicare Part B premium. This exclusion would lead to an enormous understatement in the cost of living of an elderly household. Even under the Clinton Medicare proposal, the premium is scheduled to rise by approximately \$500 per beneficiary over the next seven years. This increase will consume nearly 5 percent of the annual income of a couple with an income of \$20,000, the midpoint of the income distribution for families over 65. Under the Gingrich proposal, the total increased costs to consumers would be substantially higher.

Today's basket of health services is in many respects superior to that of, say, two decades ago—thanks to new technologies, drugs, and lifesaving procedures. It's also true that under managed care, many doctors are more harried and patients are often rushed out of hospitals. Some of the higher cost of today's health care reflects not better service, but deadweight losses—the cost of claims processing, risk selection, mergers, and acquisitions. Spending on health care has quintupled in three decades, but it's not at all clear that the quality has. It would take a great deal more research to determine how to net out the improvements and degradations to quality, and then

weigh them against the unambiguously higher cost.

Personal Business Expenditures. This category of expenditures, which includes items such as lawyers' and brokerage fees, has been rising at the rate of 0.2 percent a year for the past 20 years as a share of disposable income. This is a category of spending that may not provide direct benefits to consumers but rather is often a cost of maintaining a standard of living threatened by deteriorating external circumstances. Suppose, for example, that I have to hire a lawyer in order to resolve a dispute with my health insurance company, because health insurers are becoming more aggressive. Compared to a situation where the insurance company deals with me honorably, this is a needless expense. I am worse off in direct proportion to the amount of money that I have to spend on my lawyer, regardless of the quantity or quality of legal services provided.

Similarly, if I have to rely on a private financial counselor to ensure a secure retirement, instead of receiving a company pension, I am worse off in direct proportion to the amount of money I must pay the counselor, not the fee per financial transaction. Likewise the cost of divorce lawyers and security consultants. Since the CPI only measures the change in the price of these services, rather than the change in the overall need for the services or genuine benefit derived, it is understating the true increase in the cost of living.

Quality of Life Factors. Many factors that affect the quality of life are not picked up in the CPI.

An obvious example is crime. If people have to spend more money in order to live in a safe neighborhood—say on security alarms—it is not captured by the CPI. Nor is a deterioration in the quality of public schools and therefore an increased need for spending on private schools or personal tutors. Nor is the cost of joining a private exercise club because the local public facility has closed or become unsafe. Many of these issues are quite complex and cannot be easily quantified in any meaningful way, but this doesn't make them any less real. Anyone attempting to make conclusive statements about changes in the "true" cost of living must be prepared to address such issues.

Given the very limited amount of research on the biases in the CPI, it is impossible at this point to reach any conclusive judgment about the magnitude or direction of the overall bias in the index. While the claim that "the CPI overstates inflation" has become a virtual mantra of the Washington punditry, honest proponents of this view acknowledge that it is based on very little evidence. The best solution would be to provide the professional statisticians at BLS with the resources they need to improve the CPI. This is clearly preferable to bending economic statistics in whatever direction is politically expedient.

UNEXPECTED TWISTS

One striking thing about this whole debate is that conservatives try to have the argument both ways. Supposedly, a lower CPI would cut the deficit; and

cutting the deficit would stop us from "robbing our grandchildren." But if the Boskin panel is right and the CPI is overstated by 1 percent per year, then real median wages are rising at 2 percent per year. This means that they will double in approximately 35 years, so that the average real wage will be approximately \$50,000 a year (in 1995 dollars) in the year 2030. If so, our grandchildren will do just fine and there's no need to slash the Social Security of their grandparents.

An overstated CPI also means that people had been much poorer in the recent past than we realized. If the CPI was overstated by 1.5 percent in the past, as suggested by the Boskin Commission, then the average annual wage in 1960 was just \$11,215 measured in 1995 dollars. In 1960, today's 70-year-olds were 35. It is hard to justify taking Social Security benefits from these people in order to make the 35-year-olds of 2030 better off.

In addition, the critics have ignored the implications of a significant CPI revision for monetary policy and growth. Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, has testified that the CPI overstates inflation by as much as 1.5 percent. But if the official inflation rate is lowered, it undermines the entire rationale of Greenspan's tight money policy. So politicizing the CPI leads to some unexpected implications. It would be far better to return the question of CPI revision to intellectually honest technicians, where it belongs, and to argue deficit reduction on its merits.□

ROBERT C. LIEBERMAN

Orwell's Poor and Ours

The very rich are different from you and me," F. Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote. "Yes," Ernest Hemingway teased Fitzgerald, in a short story of his own, "they have more money." To Fitzgerald, the rich inhabited a world apart. To Hemingway, the rich were just like the rest of us, only with nicer furniture.

Today's debates about poverty mirror the Fitzgerald-Hemingway exchange. "The poor are different," some say. They live in a separate culture, bereft of the values that could lift them out of poverty. Public policy reinforces their lassitude by encouraging their morally and socially deviant tendencies. "They just have less money," reply others. They are regular folks in a desperate situation, and they behave as any of us would in the same circumstances. Provide for their material needs, or change the incentives that confront them, offer jobs that pay a living wage, and all will be well.

Something is amiss in these contending visions of the poor—or, I should say, of poverty, for these views of poor people don't have people in them, only statistics and myths. These we have in abundance—reams of tables and figures displaying the extent of deprivation, and tall tales of "welfare queens" and scam

artists buying vodka with food stamps. But where are the faces behind the statistics and the mythology, the lives of the poor themselves? In the conservative caricature, the poor remain phantoms, ciphers; their individual lives are concealed either by charts and graphs or by moralistic categories of virtue and vice. But poverty is brutal and ugly, and it is associated with many things Americans legitimately fear—crime, drugs, and the apparent breakdown of social standards, especially in cities. Many liberals, too, see poverty through a distorting lens, one that overlooks or explains away these very real and often uncomfortable facts about poverty. Some of us posit a false sameness; others see a dehumanizing degree of difference. What is missing in both views is a willingness to look hard at the actual lives of the poor.

POVERTY AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

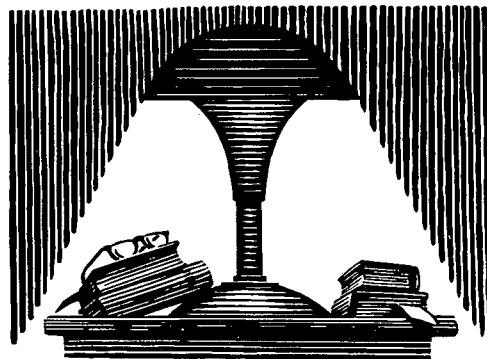
No writer has rendered these lives more vividly than George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*

and *Down and Out in Paris and London*. In these two remarkable books, Orwell addresses the very question that haunts discussions of poverty today—what is it like

to be poor? The foremost virtue of these books is their insistent, compelling reporting of poverty from the inside. His reports of the outward effects

of poverty—the decrepitude, the discomfort, the filth—are simultaneously gripping and repellent. But it is his account of poverty's effect on the soul, effects observed from personal experience coupled with keen self-knowledge, that makes Orwell unique. Orwell was also a master prose stylist, and his writing—vigorous, evocative, and utterly devoid of sentimentality—captures with masterly economy the psychological truth of poverty.

If the central image of life in poverty is dirt—and squalor is everywhere in Orwell, from the filth of poor Paris quarters and London lodging houses to grim Lancashire slums—the most vivid effect of poverty in Orwell's world is psychological. Poverty means deprivation of such basic goods as food, clothing, and



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shelter, to say nothing of such modest benefits as comfort and cleanliness. Life becomes a constant struggle, not for the spiritual or psychic rewards of worldly success or of a life well lived, but for survival, pure and simple. Orwell's poor live in a stultifying world, where the basic social and biological functions of life—eating, sleeping, avoiding disease—occupy so much attention that there is little time or energy left for more elevated concerns. The overwhelming experience of poverty for Orwell is ennui. The pursuit of petty vices such as drink and tobacco, the most readily available sources of enjoyment or entertainment, takes on exaggerated importance. When daily life is consumed with such concerns, they become the mind's only focus, and staying alive requires all one's acuity and resourcefulness. "You thought," he writes in *Down and Out*, "that [poverty] would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complex. You thought it would be terrible; it is merely squalid and boring. It is the peculiar lowness of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping."

But in Orwell's eyes, even the most visibly distasteful of the poor become sympathetic characters. Paddy Jaques, the narrator's "mate" in tramping about London in *Down and Out*, would not be out of place in any American city today. Jobless and homeless, he is lazy, filthy, ignorant, and generally unappealing. He lives in the streets or in shelters, cadging food and tobacco wherever he can. "He had," Orwell writes, "the regular char-

acter of a tramp—abject, envious, a jackal's character." Nevertheless, Orwell continues, "he was a good fellow, generous by nature and capable of sharing his last crust with a friend." More generally, Orwell argues that the only thing that separates beggars from "workers" is society's perception of the value of their trade. "A navvy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc." When he asks "Why are beggars despised?—for they are despised universally," his answer is simply that, "they fail to earn a decent living." A beggar "is simply a business man, getting his living, like other business men in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modern people, sold his honour; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich." Poverty is ultimately humiliating and demoralizing. For Orwell, the detachment of the poor from bourgeois virtues—hard work, cleanliness, self-reliance, and so forth—is an effect of poverty rather than a cause.

VICTORIAN SECRET

In the 1930s, when Orwell wrote them, these books were more than simply gripping collections of stories and images; they represented an antidote to prevailing Victorian notions of poverty. Romantic and sentimental, the Victorians viewed poverty as an individual failing. The virtues of Victorian society—hard work, responsibility, independence, and the like—were those

that would ensure material success. As Fitzgerald believed of the rich, so Victorians believed of the poor: They were different. Being poor was a sign of moral weakness, of indolence and profligacy (the poor were, to paraphrase Stephen Sondheim, "deprived on account they were depraved").

Oddly enough, all of this moral weakness vanished a decade later when the postwar economic boom produced an era of full employment. The indolent poor of the 1930s became the blue-collar middle class of the 1940s and 1950s. Evidently, they were all-too-willing to work hard for decent wages. What was missing in the 1930s, it turned out, were not virtues but jobs.

This lesson, however, has been forgotten. Modern-day conservatives have once again taken up the Victorian view. The poor are different. They are culturally deficient and morally flawed, an "underclass" whose behavior and values separate them from respectable society. "How does one cope with people who seem unable to advance even their own interests, let alone society's?" asks Lawrence Mead in *The New Politics of Poverty*.

The neo-Victorians have revived the crude moral certainties of Victorian society. In Britain, the New Poor Law of 1834 distinguished between the honest poor, those sincerely unable to support themselves, and paupers, those who were able but unwilling. Work, independence, and responsibility were the characteristic virtues of the new industrial economy in the nineteenth century, virtues that paupers conspicuously lacked. The creators of the New Poor Law

wanted to punish those who shunned these virtues, and thus while the poor received relief, paupers went to the workhouse, the only alternative to "honest" work. In this way, Victorian social policy deliberately stigmatized poverty. Never mind that the New Poor Law was a willful attempt to create a low-wage army of labor to feed the mines and mills of England, the very mines that Orwell famously describes in *Wigan Pier*. By making the alternative to work so monstrous, the Victorians could claim that only those totally devoid of sense and virtue would opt for the workhouse.

In *The De-Moralization of Society*, Gertrude Himmelfarb celebrates these Victorian virtues and decries the moral relativism of modern society. Because we have lost the capacity to judge virtue and vice, right and wrong, we have lost the ability to distinguish, as the Victorians did, between the honest poor and the shirking paupers. The problem with welfare today, she suggests, is that it does not sufficiently stigmatize the poor but instead encourages them to engage in vices such as drug abuse, crime, and premarital childbearing. Similarly, Ben Wattenberg's *Values Matter Most* (the book that provoked his well-publicized chat with President Clinton) argues that poverty is fundamentally a problem of personal virtue rather than social forces or economic realities. The chief moralizer of the new virtue industry, of course, is the modern McGuffey, William Bennett, whose *Book of Virtues*—an overstuffed sampler of cautionary tales, parables, fables, and maxims—resided atop the best-

seller list for months. These books and others have resuscitated the idea that poverty is a sign of moral failure, and they effectively tap a deep well of anxiety about moral decline.

The right thus reduces the problem of poverty to a dispute over the social standards of the poor rather than the opportunities that society presents. As Herbert Gans brilliantly relates in his new book, *The War Against the Poor*, the "under-class" nomenclature perpetuates this view of the difference, and hence the undeservingness, of the poor, allowing the rest of us to revel in our "deservingness." The distinction between "us," the deserving middle class, and "them," the undeserving poor, only reinforces our appreciation of our own virtue.

The right also magnifies the vices of the poor, placing the onus of society's problems on the poor rather than where it belongs, on those with money and power, who set society's priorities and reap society's benefits. The poor, it seems, are neither selfish enough to help themselves nor selfless enough to protect the rest of us. This view of the poor feeds the common misperception that the poor are reaping enormous benefits from government largess. To the residents of Macomb County, Michigan, reports Stanley Greenberg in *Middle Class Dreams*, nearby Detroit is "just a big pit into which the state and federal governments poured tax money, never to be heard from again: 'It's all just being funneled into the Detroit area, and it's not overflowing into the suburbs.'" For these archetypal Reagan Democrats, "Detroit" equals

"them"—that is, the black, urban poor who are themselves the source not only of their own misery but of broader social and political ills.

LOVE AND SQUALOR

If some conservative critics demonize the poor and emphasize their differentness, others such as Charles Murray posit a false commonality. The poor, for Murray, are at bottom just like us; they respond to economic incentives, based on a cost-benefit calculus. And they would behave like the rest of us, except that the welfare state has corrupted the poor with perverse "incentives to fail" that subvert fundamental bourgeois values such as family, work, education, and deferred gratification. Over time, perverse incentives harden into perverse behaviors and values.

Tellingly, Murray illustrates this worry neither with accurate data (both his arithmetic and his propositions about the effects of welfare on such behavior have mostly been discredited) nor with careful ethnographic observation but with a "thought experiment," namely Harold and Phyllis, his hypothetical young couple in *Losing Ground* who maximize their income by having a child while remaining unmarried and out of work. Murray is also cavalier on the economic benefits to be derived from available work and available wages. In the ghettos of this economy, even Victorian virtue yields Victorian squalor.

In the process of rewarding indolence, Murray contends, social programs dissolved the useful distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, not

by allaying the stigma of poverty but by dragging all the poor into "undeservingness." Welfare, he claims, has made it not only economically feasible but also "socially acceptable" to be unemployed and on the dole. Mickey Kaus similarly implicates welfare in creating a "cultural catastrophe." AFDC, he writes in *The End of Equality*, is "the underclass culture's life support system." Whatever its origins, a cultural gap separates the poor, the "underclass," from the rest of us. However they became poor, they remain so because bad incentives have created bad values.

THE FACE OF POVERTY

Orwell would be appalled, not only at the conclusion that the poor are victims of their own deviance, but, more significantly, at the way in which the contemporary right reaches these conclusions. These detached and distant analyses reduce the world of the poor to a string of cultural, behavioral, and political labels without so much as peeking around the corner, whether into the ghetto or increasingly into the suburb left in the dust by the changing international economy, to see whether their labels actually fit the poor people they might find there. Recalling Orwell's clear-headed approach to exactly this question can point us toward an antidote to such cant.

After Orwell, the Victorian view that poverty is simply the product of individual moral frailty is utterly unsustainable. The modern twist, that blames poverty on deviant values, and deviant values on the welfare state, also ignores the bleak practical choices that confront actual

people in poverty. Orwell reminds us that the poor are not loafers or scammers, hoping to get something for nothing, nor are they denizens of a subhuman culture, blissfully living out their lives of deprivation unaware of the indignity of it all. In *Wigan Pier*, Orwell tells of a train ride through Lancashire. From the window, he saw a woman huddled over trying to unclog a drain pipe behind her house, "amid monstrous scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs." As he sped by, she looked up and he saw her face:

She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to mis-carriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen. It struck me that we are mistaken when we say that "It isn't as bad for them as it would be for us," and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her—understood as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe.

The lives of the poor may not look like our lives, but their souls are certainly like our souls; anyone who thinks otherwise cannot have looked closely enough. Or-

well looked closely enough, closer than most of us could stomach.

As a critic of political rhetoric, Orwell was fearless in criticizing the left as well as the right. What he saw and chronicled is that life among the poor is different, though not in the ways that the Victorians claimed—that is, poverty is not simply evidence of moral failure. But reading Orwell on poverty should give pause to the left as well. Some on the left have tried to dismiss the underclass label too sweepingly, ignoring a way of life that has indeed become dysfunctional—epidemics of drugs, crime, teenage pregnancy, multigenerational welfare dependence, compounded by racial segregation and official indifference. As William Julius Wilson has argued, the left is still recovering from its reaction to the Moynihan report on the Negro family thirty years ago—to sweep it under the rug, as if it were in bad taste to discuss such sordid matters outside the family circle, so to speak. The litany of social ills may have grown more sinister since Orwell's day, but his account of despair, hopelessness, and ennui still rings true and, if anything, cries out more urgently than ever for attention.

Fortunately, there has been in recent years a resurgence of vivid thinking and writing about America's poor—from the journalism of Jason DeParle of the *New York Times* and Alex Kotlowitz to the stunning ethnographic scholarship of anthropologist Elliot Liebow, sociologist Elijah Anderson, and historian Carl Husemoller Nightingale—that evokes the best in Orwell's work. "Street wisdom," for example, the complex ghetto

street culture that Anderson describes, is a set of tools, strategems, and rules of thumb that allows urban residents to negotiate inner-city streets and even to build some semblance of a community on the ruins of urban civilization. For the children of the Chicago projects that Kotlowitz chronicles, the overwhelming fear of violence curtails the dreams of youth and replaces them tragically and prematurely with intimations of mortality and despair. And as Nightingale depicts his young African American friends in Philadelphia, they are hardly alienated from mainstream American values; rather, they are entirely products of those values, almost hyper-American, caught between ubiquitous cultural images of law and order, crime and punishment, violence, and consumerism on one hand and the painful, dissonant reality of their own lives on the other.

All of these writers have sought to approach poverty, particularly the poverty of the urban ghetto, not as a distant and faceless phenomenon but as an immediate and gripping reality that wreaks havoc and despair in the lives of whole neighborhoods and generations. They fall prey neither to the conservative temptation to assume the worst of the poor nor to the liberal instinct to evade the apparent pathologies of poverty. Like Orwell, they do not shrink from describing the ugly scenes of life in poor neighborhoods. Their writings are full of the same characters who populate conservative demonology—jobless men, teenage mothers, crack addicts, gang members, and fragile children. Their por-

traits, however, are not of soulless cardboard cutouts but of real people coping as best they can with the circumstances that society has dealt them. Writing from a stance of empathy and understanding, they do not flinch from describing the difference of life among the poor. But it is precisely their empathetic stance that reveals these differences, the “pathologies” of poverty, to be adaptive—ways of struggling to make lives out of desperate circumstances in ways that are unfathomable from the comfort of universities, think tanks, or TV rooms. These writers reaffirm Orwell’s conclusion that the poor are ultimately human beings no different from you and me; that they are the victims of complex economic and cultural circumstances not of their own making, and the remedies will need to be complex as well. The new naturalistic chroniclers of poverty put the lie to the banalities of the cultural conservatives.

The clarity of Orwell’s vision sets a task for progressives who recognize the urgency of addressing the shameful crisis of abiding poverty in the United States. More than at any time in the past sixty years, the American poor and working and middle classes are at common risk. Barry Bluestone calculates that the median working family, given its meager savings, is 3.6 months away from poverty should a breadwinner become jobless. The blue-collar bulwarks of the mid-century boom face increasingly the danger of losing the hard-won gains of their parents and grandparents. Poverty looms for them and their children as it has not in two generations. The time is ripe

for a new New Deal coalition, uniting the poor and the working middle class, whose common anxieties and aspirations should be the basis for a powerful political message.

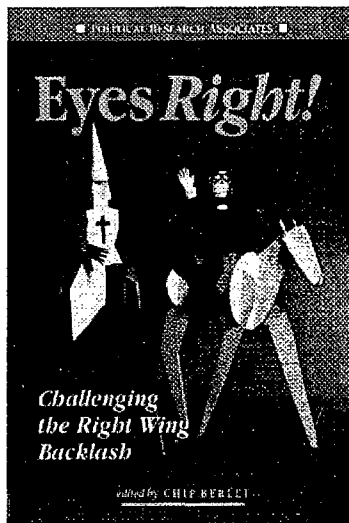
So long as the cultural conservatives set the imagery of the poverty debate with arguments about pathologies of poverty and the moral difference of the poor, they carry the day politically by dividing the sinking middle class from the poor they are approaching. Instead of alliance there is only contempt, relations poisoned by “us” vs. “them” rhetoric that pits Macomb Counties against Detroit throughout the country. As in the 1930s, when Orwell wrote, the poor and the working class share an interest in vigorous government action to create economic opportunity, preserve the dignity and rewards of work, and provide a cushion against what Franklin Roosevelt called “the hazards and vicissitudes of life.” But these common interests are obscured, and the promise of liberal renewal is undermined, by the “underclass” rhetoric that casts the poor as the enemy within, rather than as allies in a common enterprise.

The task for liberals is to break down the “us” vs. “them” mentality on both sides of the divide. As a political task, it will require addressing the pernicious racial segregation that still poisons American life. As an intellectual task, it will require recapturing Orwell’s soul-searching honesty in addressing the poor as neighbors and fellow citizens rather than as dirty and dangerous scoundrels. For conservatives to call them so—and for liberals to accede—is positively Orwellian. □

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HOW TO ZERO OUT THE DEBT

J. Fife Symington III, the Republican governor of Arizona, is so conservative that he has sought to abolish the state's Department of Education. But, poor fellow, he's broke, as the *Economist* recently reported. When he was elected in 1991, Symington said he was worth \$10 million. Three months later, he claimed his net worth dropped to a negative \$23 million. These things happen. This past fall, in an unprecedented step for a sitting governor, Symington filed for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 7, which allows him to stiff his creditors and get a fresh start in life.

Now *this* is an imaginative new idea in state fiscal policy. Many conservatives say they are opposed to debt; only Symington has shown how to get rid of it entirely. We all sometimes need a fresh start, governments included. And Symington is doing it in a way that demonstrates personal responsibility by protecting home and family. His home is in his wife's name, and her fortune is beyond the reach of creditors, who also cannot touch Symington's family trust funds (he is a direct descendant of Henry Clay Frick). A property developer, Symington explains that all 13 of his projects failed

because the market collapsed in the late '80s. Hey, it wasn't his fault. He was just an innocent victim. Which is how a lot of Arizonans must feel.

Moral: If you're just plain poor and broke, you have no right to expect help, certainly not in self-reliant Arizona. To get public sympathy and government protection, you need to lose millions.

MORE SYMPATHY FOR THE RICH

How the rich suffer! The headline on the cover of *Forbes's* 1995 issue on the 400 Richest People in America is "Rich But Broke," the story of the Robinson family of Hawaii. The Robinsons, it turns out, have land holdings (including an entire island) worth half a billion dollars but claim to face problems paying estate taxes because profits from their sugar plantation are down. Here they are, decent, simple Americans living in their private paradise with a small native Hawaiian population totally dependent on them, when along comes the evil tax collector. It's enough to make you want to be sure that Steve Forbes is the Republican candidate for president in 1996.

TIGHT FITTINGS

The same issue of *Forbes* carries the story of secretive billion-

aire Fred Lennon, chairman of Crawford Fitting Co. If you've never heard of him or it, there may be a reason. Lennon cultivates obscurity. *Forbes* explains that he has "broken his empire into dozens of separate firms . . . many [of his factories] don't have signs. When Lennon buys a factory from another company, he sometimes leaves the old sign up as a decoy." Like Vladimir Ilyich, this Lennon follows the pattern of "underground political organizations" by keeping managers informed only about their own cells—that is, their divisions.

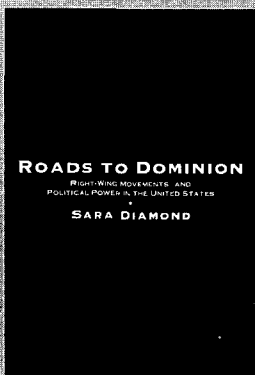
Politics may have something to do with the secrecy. Lennon is one of the largest personal funders of the Republican Party, though Richard Nixon was too much of a liberal for him. According to *Forbes*, he requires each of the company's salesmen (whom he hires and fires at will) to contribute to his hand-picked political candidates, and he verifies the contributions by collecting the checks himself.

Republicans have lately been denouncing the *voluntary* one-dollar checkoff for presidential campaigns on the federal income tax form as an undue intrusion. But privately extracted political money, like Lennon's, is just fine. In the upside-down world of the right, private impositions are freedom, while attempts to use government to lessen dependency on private power are always an imposition.

—P.S.



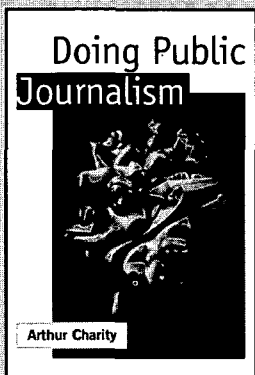
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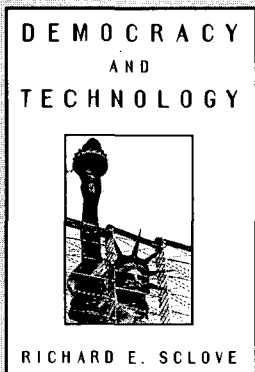
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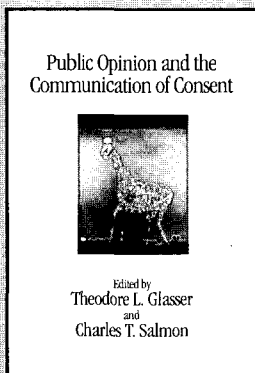
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